

SÁNDOR MÁRAI

MEMOIR OF HUNGARY

1944–1948

*Translated with an introduction
and notes by Albert Tezla*

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INTRODUCTION

On February 22, 1989, the phone rang in the Budapest apartment of Szegedy-Maszák, one of Márai's few remaining friends in Hungary. At the other end of the line was a San Diego reporter inquiring about the very old man who had apparently committed suicide the day before, and whose ashes were to be scattered in the Pacific Ocean two days later. It should occasion no surprise that the caller from America required information about a Hungarian writer who had left his homeland forty years before, and had lived in several countries before settling into a reclusive life in his eightieth year in San Diego. But what may surprise readers outside Hungary is that, at the time of his death, even in the land of his birth, where he had once been a best-selling author, most readers under forty had not read any of his writings and, it is very likely, most of those in their twenties would not even recognize his name. Before leaving Hungary for political reasons in September 1948, Márai had published forty-six books, mostly novels. He enjoyed a large readership among city dwellers and the middle class, and Hungarian critics and literary historians considered him to be the nation's most influential representative of middle-class literature between the two world wars. Moreover, he had, in the forty years since his departure, added sixteen titles to his list of publications, all in Hungarian, though these works were read in Hungary only by an intellectual élite of his own generation who were able to slip them past customs officials on returns from rare visits to the West.

Márai began his long writing career when he was only fourteen with an article in a newspaper published in Kassa, his birthplace, then a part of Upper Hungary. By eighteen he was contributing feuilletons to the *Budapesti Napló* (Budapest Journal), a liberal

political daily. He was only eighteen when his first book of poems appeared, and twenty-one when his second was published, also in Kassa, which by then had become a part of Czechoslovakia by terms of the Treaty of Trianon. At the same age, he issued a play in five scenes, composed in German, in Berlin. Although he continued to increase his journalistic activities by serving on the staff of *Újság* (The Journal) and *Pesti Hírlap* (Pest Daily), both newspapers claiming to be independent politically, and by contributing to several Western periodicals, and wrote poems and plays and various kinds of prose fiction throughout his life, the novel became his principal genre after 1924, the year in which his short novel, *A mészáros* (The Butcher), appeared in Vienna. Altogether, he published nineteen novels before he left Hungary and eight thereafter.

The dominant theme of his *belles-lettres* is the decay of the Hungarian middle class. Destiny, Márai noted, rarely hands a writer a great theme that is so personal as this was to him, one that the writer himself experiences and witnesses in its dénouement: "This is the Hungarian middle class whose way of life I was born into, observed, came to know and scrutinized in all its features to its very roots, and now I see the whole disintegrating. Perhaps this is my life's, my writing's sole, true duty: to delineate the course of this disintegration." By the time he registered this sense of commitment in his journal during the devastation that the Second World War brought to Hungary, he had substantially accomplished this mission, one to which he dedicated the remainder of his writings as well. His detailed explorations and analyses of the decline of the middle class also pervade the five published journals which, somewhat in the manner of Jules Renard, whose posthumous *Journal: 1887-1910* (1925-27) Márai reviewed in Hungary, trace his literary, political and social views as they relate to the turbulent events of his life from 1943 to 1983. *Föld, föld!*... (lite-

rally Land! Land!...), the *Memoir of Hungary 1944–1948*, which focuses on the events in postwar Hungary that eventually persuaded him to leave his homeland, also concerns itself with the role of the middle class in Hungary's deterioration as a nation. Delineating the course of the disintegration of the middle class was not an easy task for Márai. In the *1968–1975 Journal*, Márai calls himself "a typical middle-class revolutionary," an antithesis that troubles him: "I live in anarchy, which I feel to be immoral, and I have difficulty bearing this state;" and earlier, a character in *Az igazi* (The Right Man, 1941) may well be voicing Márai's feelings about his dilemma in preserving a harmonious relationship with his social class: "I am a bourgeois. I am deliberately so, I acknowledge its destiny ..., I don't care for drawing-room revolutions. Human beings should remain faithful to those to whom their descent, upbringing and memories bind them."

As that "typical middle-class revolutionary," Márai castigates the members of the Hungarian middle class for several major shortcomings that had a detrimental impact on Hungary's future after the First World War. His indignation at their failure to rise to the historic challenge of reconstructing the defeated nation is punctuated by recurring epithets: they were greedy, corrupt, boorish, smug, envious, lazy. Instead of unifying Hungary, they foolishly waged war against the Hungarian people, whom they never even took the trouble to know, and whom they looked down upon; they lacked "a responsible national conscience" and cared only for the welfare and fate of their own class. Moreover, their obsession with commercialism and their vulgarization of the news media, book publishing, the fine arts and literature so dominated Hungarian life that they gradually corrupted the populace. Ultimately, the middle class prevented the nation from acquiring cosmopolitan cultural values and from developing the sense of moral commitment to community

that the Hungarian nation needed for it to solve the complex political and economic problems produced by the breakup of the Dual Monarchy. And he was especially unsparing in his assault on the members of the middle class for their right-wing political orientation, because, he was convinced, their adulation of the Germans seduced the class into becoming a tool of Nazism, thus smuggling the viciousness and perversity of that modern form of dictatorship into Eastern Europe. Although Hungarian society as a whole failed to oppose Nazism, the middle class, he believed, was especially culpable for the depth to which Nazi doctrines took root in Hungary: "between the two world wars, it made no effort to create some form of democratic society," which was, in his opinion, the only social and political force that could have repelled German fascism successfully; "it did just the opposite to serve its own interests." In Márai's view, the triumph of Nazism and its depraved Hungarian version, the Arrow Cross Party under the leadership of Ferenc Szálasi, was the expected and direct consequence of the profound failure of the middle class to foster the values of Europeanism in Hungary. Its members had, since the end of the First World War, methodically weaned themselves from the humanism and the democratic principles of European civilization: the demanding criteria of that civilization's educational institutions and culture and its high standards of human excellence. That fateful shunning of these European values, he predicted during the Second World War, would bring about the collective fall of the Hungarian middle class. What is called the Christian order and the "Christian Hungarian gentlemen," he insisted, would inevitably vanish from the scene: "Christianity, they called it – and by that they understood a trade license to which they laid claim without any education in technology. Christianity, they called it, and by that they understood the intimidation of every free thought and

expression of individual opinion. 'We are Christians,' they said, and they held out their hands."

Márai did not let the European middle class go unscathed either. To the contrary, he held it responsible for the fact that the intellect had lost its exalted place and fundamental role in European culture during the twenty-five-year period after the First World War and that, by doing so, the middle class had rejected humanism, which Márai believed to be Europe's "great gift to mankind's domain," for it produced the Renaissance and the Reformation, two climactic periods of intellectual change in the history of Western civilization, events which, he hastens to point out, never transpired in Russia. While walking the streets of Zürich in 1947, during his first visit to the West since the end of the war, he asserts that "only in Europe was humanism a living imperative shaping life, human destiny, intellectual attitudes and social responsibility," the belief that man is the measure of all things, a human attitude that "does not hope for a supernatural reply to the problem of death, nor expect solutions to human problems from supernatural powers, "for man, a two-legged mammal abandoned and shaped by blind accidental will in an indifferent and hostile universe ... is the only living creature who can find his way in the world independently of his instincts. The 'human' was missing now. It was this that had perished in Europe."

Márai's definition of man as the measure of all things in "an indifferent and hostile universe" resulted in neither a sentimental view of the elevated status of humankind in the scheme of things nor a bathetic response to the distressful condition in which humans are forced to work out their individual destinies. Rather, it imposed on the individual being a rigorous form of behavior in the social community more reminiscent of More's Utopia than Rabelais's Abbey of Thélème. Márai's exemplar was the individual who ad-

hered faithfully to the cultural obligations imposed by a purposeful life, whose ethical values are created by personal discipline and whose "first principle is the fulfilment of duty," a being who shapes his life by creative work in which, Márai proclaimed, "the highest degree of pleasure bursts into flame" and who, despite all evidence to the contrary, continues to be enticed by the vision of human perfectibility. It was the dénouement of this humanistic ideal which he believed himself to be witnessing in Europe and which gave him a deep sense of estrangement. Weighing the degradation of this historic humanistic ideal by Europeans between the end of the First World War and the appalling horrors of the German concentration camps, Márai wonders what factor could possibly still bind him to Europe: "... perhaps it was the consciousness that we were all guilty, Europeans, Easterners and Westerners, because we lived here and tolerated, allowed everything to reach the point it did ... We were guilty because we were Europeans and we tolerated the destruction of 'humanism' in the consciousness of European man." To him, the tragic consequence of this destruction is that Europe is now without its traditional "sense of mission ..., the consciousness that being born in Europe, being a European was not only a physical or political condition but a creed." Systems, he found, had replaced the exercise of humanistic values everywhere he looked; he was, he concluded, a stranger in that very Europe whose values had so definitively shaped his own world outlook. Nothing would ever assuage his anger at the middle class for this betrayal of the traditional humanistic values integral to the preservation of a civilized Europe.

It was, however, for Communism and its fellow travelers that Márai reserved his most acerbic observations. He bitterly opposed Marxist Leninism on the grounds that it was an inhumane system, and he agreed with Milovan Djilas that it was nothing more

than state capitalism under the dictatorial rule of a privileged New Class without the capacity to convert the ethical ideals of socialism into reality. For Europeans, he insisted, the issue of Communism "was not a political, not even a question of class power, but a question of existence or non-existence." Of course, Russian occupation of and the exportation of Communist ideology to postwar Hungary gave Márai an extraordinary experience with the tragic impact of Communism on the East European nations that were forced to accept it. Even as he had observed the rightist view in Hungary after the First World War culminate in the seizure of power by the Arrow Cross near the end of the Second World War, so did he witness from 1945 to 1948 the sickening spectacle of Hungarian agents and their adherents imposing Communism on the Hungarian nation under the dictates of Moscow. His views of the Soviet Union and Communism are developed at length in *Memoir of Hungary*. Let it suffice here to say that Márai never forgave the Hungarian Communists who, trained in Moscow during their long exile, returned in the wake of the Soviet Army to plot against and eventually to establish absolute control over all the institutions of the Hungarian nation. Nor did he spare those Hungarians, especially the writers, who cooperated with them to advance their careers. Unlike so many Hungarian writers-in-exile, Márai never returned to Hungary, not even for a visit, even after the political situation began to ease significantly in the late 1970s; in his case, the failure of the 1956 Revolution made his decision permanent. Moreover, he refused to permit any of his works to be published in Hungary. Asked by Püski, a New York bookseller, for permission to arrange for the publication of his works with the Academy Publishing House in Hungary on the grounds that democracy was certain to be restored in his homeland, he replied on December 13, 1988:

It was forty years ago this summer that I left Hungary because the rights of freedom were suspended. I don't know whether I have the means of waiting out the changes, but I would rather not have my publications appear in Hungary. Thank you for your kind recommendation, and I hope your predictions will become a reality.

Ten days later, just two months before his death, he recorded his conditions for publication in Hungary on a note card:

I am a Hungarian writer, and it will always be a great honor for me if my books are made available to Hungarian readers, but I shall agree to a new edition only if the occupying Soviet military forces (in their entirety and with all their armaments) leave the country, and, following this, a multi-party system is restored with the force of law, and democratic, free elections are held with trustworthy foreign observers present.

Márai perceived himself to be a representative of a "graying civilization," an observer of the last stage in the history of Christianity and liberalism. Surveying the span of human history since the late 1930s, he notes in 1988, in the introduction to *A Garrenék műve* (The Garrens' Work): "Costumes and emblems have changed in the last half-century but the plot remains the same: dictatorship stifling the expression of thought and enterprise and now and then resorting to wars because it hopes that that will free it from its internal and external problems." Once again, he does not let the middle class escape unscathed, repeating a familiar criticism about its degeneration: "The middle class, which followed the bourgeoisie in the overcrowded, technologically self-contained world, already does not create, it only consumes." Because civiliza-

tion, having lost the fusive power of a uniform culture created by the middle class, has devalued contemplative behavior and weakened faith in the intellect, everything is "changing and disintegrating. The world is an empty and meaningless place, and nothing in it more empty and meaningless than Man himself." Even religion can no longer offer any consolation to human beings. Márai, a Catholic who always prized his early Catholic schooling and remained a humanistic Catholic, eventually decided that God no longer exists in the traditional sense, that Christ was not divine but a philosopher with lofty ethical concepts worth adopting and applying to life, and, consequently, that humankind confronts chaos without God. In the 1968-75 *Journal*, he calls religion an illusion, adding that "there is some madness in every realized illusion." Then, in an apparent echo of the view of Erasmus's Folly, who insisted that "Every individual is entitled to illusions," Márai chooses a religious illusion from the Far East for his own consolation: "Among the religious illusions, Buddhism is the most sympathetic to me, for it doesn't promise anything. More precisely, it promises nothing, Nirvana; thus it is candid." Elsewhere, in the 1958-67 *Journal*, he writes: "St. Francis was compelled to fear death because he was a believer. I, for example, don't believe in an after-life; so I am not afraid of death." His ultimate hope is that he will experience "an absolute death," one that will spare him the threat of resurrection: "To step out into the Silence, into the Darkness without prosthesis and hope, the last dignity to which Man has the right between two Voids: the Void before birth and the Void after death." In the course of this passage between the two Voids, human beings learn that life has only one palpable meaning: mortality.

These pessimistic responses to the state of Western civilization and the human condition echo Spengler, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Sartre; their atti-

tudes but not necessarily their concepts. For if, according to Márai, human beings can no longer turn for support to the political, economic, social and religious institutions created by a once humanistic middle class, then how can they possibly reverse the decline of Western civilization and redeem the human condition amid the historical ruins characterized chiefly by a lost morality? Márai is convinced that "only culture can save the human spirit, only human spirit the culture." Finding the ultimate value in the activities of the creative imagination, he claims that "the arts exist to keep us from falling into ruin," and the arts he has in mind are clear: "It is absolutely certain that the issue [today] is not that of a world war, not that of an artificial peace, but that of Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Michelangelo, Goethe and Shakespeare. Everything else is interlude, and dull and indifferent in its horrors." Indeed, to humanity only one kind of freedom is possible: "the creative individual's will when he bends over his work." Among the arts, Márai singles out literature – for him personally imaginative literature was a way of life and an ethical vehicle – for an especially crucial role in the restoration of human content to life: "Only literature keeps watch over human meaning ..." Even here, though, he felt anxiety about the ability of literature to fulfill its mission. During the Paris visit recounted in the *Memoir*, he was profoundly distressed about the devaluation of the intellectual function of books he was finding in the West: "... the book (hence the literary form through which Europe spoke with its true voice) had changed in its essence, in its organic reality: it was no longer a Message, only an international medium, a commodity." Politicians, he maintains, will organize the New Europe, pedagogues teach the ways of human coexistence, but writers are indispensable to the creation of the human bond:

Perhaps the poets. Perhaps one day a writer will speak up and again give humans the strength needed for the enormous duty they have to live together: he will provide more than social strength. Everything depends on this. St. Paul could give such strength – at a transitional moment similar to today's divided world order, divided ways of life – and later Dostoevsky ... to his people. I am waiting for a writer who will begin singing in the public squares, and people will look up and abandon the words that had pummeled their ears, and they will understand that something else is at stake.

By the time the Second World War came, Márai felt suffocated by the political situation under Regent Horthy and the growing presence of German fascism. In the 1943–1944 *Journal*, he described his state of mind: "In Hungary, one can live only in internal emigration. By turning completely inward, toward my work. By emigrating into my work." Fortunately, at the end of the war, the new atmosphere of freedom produced an outburst of literary activity. With censorship lifted and intellectual horizons unobstructed, all kinds of writing, including socialist, were published. Experimentation commenced, and before long, as writers began acquainting themselves with fresh currents in Western literature, many views of life and forms of literary expression, particularly in poetry and fiction, thrived side by side. This enormous surge in creativity was energized by many new journals that zealously advocated certain literary approaches, as well as partisan political viewpoints, and found, for a time, common ground in supporting humanistic principles. Although the rabid struggle among the several political parties often interfered with literary activities, writers were vigorous enough to withstand the paralyzing effects of the worsening political situation and to set in motion various

literary trends so firmly that many of them managed to outlast, albeit in the "desk drawer," the cultural policies pernicious to *belles-lettres* put into effect in 1948, when the Communist Party took control of the nation. In this climate, Márai, whose publication of fourteen books during the war years reflected his "emigration into my work," published eight works in a three-year period, including two novels, the *1943-1944 Journal*, a play, a book of feuilletons, and two books of didactic prose, one entitled *Európa elrablása* (The Ravishing of Europe, 1947). And yet, as he reports in his *Memoir*, he became conscious of the painful fact that the turn of events produced by the Hungarian Communists maneuvering their way into power would eventually deprive him of the right "to emigrate into my own work," even worse, that the new order would deny him "the right to silence" with its insistence that all Hungarian writers contribute to the establishment of a socialist state. Later, in his *1968-1975 Journal*, he states:

In critical times, the moment arrives for the writer when he must decide whether he must relate what he has to say with perhaps corroded words in the linguistic sense but freely [in exile], or to lie in his pure native language with gasping circumlocution. This is a grating, difficult moment. But it cannot be avoided.

In his mind, the time for a decision had arrived.

So he began a forty-year odyssey. He searched for a home first in Switzerland and then in Italy. Following several visits to the United States, he lived in New York City from 1952 to 1967, writing and working for Radio Free Europe, and became an American citizen in 1957, after the failure of the 1956 Revolution in Hungary became certain. Then, finally, in 1979, in his eightieth year, he settled in San Diego, slipped into a reclusive life and wrote "freely" in the language which

he called his "only homeland," in a country which, though it may be lacking the priceless ancient cultural reflexes of a thousand years of European civilization, produced, in his view, the opportunities for a desirable way of life and is motivated ideally by "the spirit of tolerance and disciplined collaboration" among individuals. But Márai, the proverbial outsider, never felt at home anywhere. On leaving a rather primitive hospital in Italy after a four-week stay, he confessed to being a stranger in the world: "When I step out into the ward, I perceive, to my surprise, that this sty, this underworld stable of the body's dissolution gave me something. It was as if through the course of weeks I had belonged somewhere. In past years I had never felt this, neither in Hungary nor in America."

Though he continued to write to the end, he spent his last years in growing solitude. In 1986, his isolation became nearly complete: "This year Lola [his wife] died. She was followed by my siblings, my younger sister and my older brother, Gábor, and now my younger brother, Géza. I am a weary stray, I tarry as a straggler with the strength to take a few steps, I hobble after them in single file." His son, an orphan he and Lola had adopted during the war in Budapest, died in 1987, perhaps of a heart attack, perhaps by his own hand, leaving a wife and three children, whom Márai loved but to whom, according to reports, he never felt close. He became nearly blind, but brushed off all efforts to lighten his burden, insisting he did not need any help. Considering his blindness and poor health to be strictly a private matter, he never complained to anyone. In 1988, he wrote to a friend: "Sometimes I feel like a thoughtless guest who has overstayed his welcome. The hosts entreat him amiably to stay on, but it happens that in an unguarded moment someone looks at his watch and shakes his head." Late in the last year of his life, the thought of suicide appeared in a telephone conversation with a friend of forty years who was urg-

ing him to go to Hungary now that traveling there had become a civil and friendly prospect and accept tributes: "Look, say what is true, that my physical condition is so weak that I am unable to go out, and I am not in a position to make a visit outside the house." In a letter to this friend, the thought of suicide definitely enters his mind: "I am beginning to lose my patience."

This erudite and astute observer of the human scene, this intellectual in the richest European sense of the word who had lived through three calamities suffered by his country – defeats in two world wars and Communist take-over in 1948 – had throughout his life sought that solitude which he believed essential to a contemplative existence. Perhaps, during the long years of inner exile that began in Hungary and proved to be so productive, Márai experienced, at times, the consolation of the personal Nirvana that a character in his *Ég és föld* (Heaven and Earth, 1942) describes:

You completely serve human beings when you withdraw from their affairs... By throwing away everything we have accumulated, protected and carried, by still hearing the sounds of the world but with half-closed eyes, like someone who has come to rest at a foreign inn, sounds of the city with which you are no longer really concerned and whose joys and despairs, lechery and morality, legal system and interdictions no longer touch you, the transient, the foreigner ... by dropping everything we thought we could not live without, by forgetting ambition, arrogance, the parchedness of carnal pleasure, the stress of work – by forgetting the faces of those we love the way one falling to sleep forgets their lineaments by day, by still hearing the world but no longer paying attention to it, by still remembering but smiling because it no longer hurts, by taking off the ring, the watch, the clothing, the

titles, the responsibilities, by throwing away the body, too, this worn and suspect tissue, to extinguish every light, by being alone, no longer even shuddering, by falling asleep, and sleeping.

Radical political changes swept away the conditions that Márai had imposed on permission for the publication of his works in Hungary. In 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev appeared on the world stage to loosen the Soviet Union's grip on the foreign and domestic affairs of the East European nations and, in time, to remove all armed forces from within their borders. Soviet intervention no longer threatening them, progressive elements in Hungary inside and outside the Communist Party seized the opportunity to initiate the many democratic reforms that by the fall of 1989 culminated in a multi-party system and open elections monitored, as Márai had demanded, by "trustworthy foreign observers". Today his name is known to the latest generations in Hungary, and, once written out of the nation's memory, his works are now being reassessed by critics and literary historians. He was elected member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences on September 7, 1989. Academician József Újfalussy said on that ceremonial occasion:

This rehabilitation, as in other cases, represents more than a simple declaration; it also represents a homecoming.... This homecoming means that Sándor Márai can again be present at home, in the common consciousness of the public, in the consciousness of intellectuals, and in the circulation of books.

In the same year, he was also awarded the nation's highest recognition for literature, the Kossuth Prize. And in 1990 an edition of his collected works began to appear.

His forty-two-year odyssey had ended.

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PART ONE

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*"... And the world shrinks back as the war
Unleashes its leaden throated roar
And brute atrocities scorch all here
On each front door the sign appears
In blood of Christian, Jew and European
They have destroyed the worthy we believed in
All the things worth living for. Odium
A carcass in your bed, a fetid cave your home.
Both the lock and their faith in the skinner's fist
The gates have been opened to the Apocalypse
And ritual slaughter shrieks down on the world.
The one who kisses me today, tomorrow
me inters
The one I embrace today, tomorrow will be
sepulchred.
Who rocks me asleep tonight will at dawn prove
traitor..."*

(Christmas 1944)

1

Name days in Hungary have always been considered convivial, hospitable tribal holidays. And so, as the Gregorian calendar ordained, this year, too – 1944, on Sándor day, March 18 – we invited several relatives to dinner to celebrate the occasion.

As wartime shortages dictated, the dinner was modest. But this year, too, friends living on the shores of Lake Balaton sent us several bottles of full-bodied wine produced by the fiery volcanic soil. The early spring night was crisp, cold, and it was pleasant to have not only the meagerly stoked tile stoves heating the rooms but also the serious spirits of the wine warming our guests. We were sitting in the old house in Buda, in the flat which had been my home for nearly two decades.

There are days when persons live with an intuitive certainty, as if they have heard some news or word that will directly intervene in individual lives. One cannot tell what it is, but a moment has arrived, there is a smell to it. The name-day gathering had this kind of smell in mid-March 1944. We did not “know” anything for certain, but everyone scented that a fundamental, decisive change was brewing, indeed was close at hand.

At this time, in the blacked-out city, at the time of Voronezh and other war tragedies, its inhabitants, who had till then been relatively spared, were not leading the social life they formerly had. Still, on this particular evening my wife arranged the name-day dinner just as she had in times when we saw to our guests in peacetime. Our household had dug out of the bottoms of cupboards the family’s Meissen china with the onion pattern, set the table with the old silver, and lavishly lighted the table with candles in French candelabra in

place of electricity. Eleven of us sat around the oval table. After that evening, these eleven beings never again sat down together at the same table. Now it is no longer possible for them to do so again, for several of them have died.

The intimate, ominous flickering of candlelight illuminated the faces, the bourgeois interior, the old furniture. I never bought any furniture; everything we owned was inherited from the estates of our two families, from two households in Upper Hungary. We didn't have any art treasures, but we didn't have a single piece of store-bought furniture either. The tastes and habits of our ancestors had selected everything arranged in our rooms.

The doors stood open between the rooms. Now, as I think back on this scene ominously lighted by the flickering candleflames, it all strikes me as if we, the bourgeois progeny of Upper Hungary and Buda, had reprised for ourselves the life of our fathers for one last time. On this night, everything that formed the props and scenery of those bygone days came to life again.

Conversation began perfunctorily, but the wine and the family chatter of old acquaintances helped us through the initial stiffness. After dinner we remained at the table, of course, and following Hungarian custom, we began chatting over wine and demitasse.

Inevitably the moment arrived when the guests and hosts began to discuss politics with a passion. This evening was special and it remained memorable both in light of the events that occurred afterwards – the sequel was nothing less than the total destruction and extinction of an entire way of life – and in another way as well: the moment had once again come when human beings sensed their fate with their instincts at least as much as with their intellects and with information. Our guests, all relatives, with a single exception, were unequivocally anti-Nazis. But they all feared the end of the war, and their wary conjectures were de-

livered in worried tones about what the immediate future would be like, what the chilly spring would bring, how the military situation would work out, and how Hungary would fare in the cataclysm.

The majority of the disputants shared the concern that we could expect nothing good. But before long the relative who was a friend of the Nazis brought up the myth of "miracle weapons." At the time, the country was full of such tales; people were talking about a weapon that would "freeze" the enemy and about airplanes that flew with the speed of lightning so that pilots had to be plastered into their cockpits to keep them from falling out. We quickly dismissed such nonsense with a wave of the hand.

What could not be disposed of so readily was fear, fear of the reality that the final outcome of the war was near. When I stated that we must accept responsibility for the consequences and break with the Germans, most of the guests agreed, though rather diffidently – but not the relative who had befriended the Nazis. He now flared up. Tipsy, he pounded the table and repeated the preachments of "holding out" and "loyalty to the alliance" appearing in editorials.

When I took issue with him, he gave a surprising reply.

"I am a National Socialist," he shouted. "You" – he pointed at me – "can't understand this because you are talented. But I'm not, and that is why I need National Socialism."

The passionate words died away; the hot-blooded relative had declared the truth of his life, and, breathing a sigh of relief, he now stared straight ahead. Several began to laugh; but the laughter was bitter, somehow nobody was really in the mood to laugh. When we suddenly caught the drift of what he said, I answered that I don't put much trust in my "talent" – it is the kind of talent that must be proven newly every day – but I would not be a follower of the

ideals of National Socialism even if I had no talent, which is not beyond question. The relative shook his head gravely.

"You can't possibly understand," he repeated mechanically and struck his chest. "Now it's about us, the untalented," he said, with strange self-confession, like the hero in a Russian novel. "Our time has come!"...

Now we began laughing with relief and talked about other matters.

Toward midnight our guests said goodbye, for in the darkened city the streetcars ran only during certain hours of the night. When I accompanied the last of them to the vestibule, the telephone rang. I recognized the voice of a friend, a civil servant in the prime minister's office. He never phoned at night. For this reason I asked warily:

"What's up?"

"The Germans occupied Hungary tonight."

He said this in a very calm, natural voice, as if he were passing on a bit of social news. He was an outstanding, disciplined official. We were silent for a time. I asked:

"Where are they?"

"The Germans? Here, on Castle Hill. They are advancing in tanks. I'm watching them from a window."

"Where are you now?"

"At the ministry."

"Can you make it down to my place?"

"That's impossible now," he calmly said. "They won't let me pass between the tanks. But tomorrow, if they haven't arrested me yet, maybe I'll come down."

"Good night," I said, feeling what I was saying was stupid.

"Good night," he answered gravely.

He put down the phone. He wasn't arrested on

the next day but on the third, and he was immediately taken away to a German internment camp.

... The maid came in and began clearing the table, wearing white gloves, as she did when serving, because this was also one of the rules of the house. I went to my room and sat down at the old desk. Before the windows, the city was silent in the spring night. Only occasionally did a tank rumble on its way to Castle Hill, carrying members of the Gestapo to occupy the offices. I listened to the clattering tanks and smoked cigarettes. The room was pleasantly lukewarm. I looked absent-mindedly at the books lining the walls, the six thousand volumes I had gathered together in various places in the world. Here was that Marcus Aurelius I bought from a second-hand dealer on the banks of the Seine, Eckermann's *Conversations*, and an old Hungarian edition of the Bible. And six thousand more books. From a wall my father, grandfather, and deceased relatives looked down at me.

2

I encountered my first Russian soldier several months later, on the second day of Christmas 1944. He was a young man, a White Russian, I believe; he had a typically Slavic face, with wide cheekbones, and blond hair, with a lock sticking out from under a fur cap pointed like a helmet and marked by the Soviet star. He galloped into the courtyard of the village's parish hall, a submachine gun in his hand; in his wake rode two older, bearded, somber-faced privates. He leveled his weapon at me and asked:

"Who are you?"

A writer, I told him. We stood in the snow, the horses exhaling their fatigue from their lungs in steamy puffs. Like Russian soldiers generally, this one rode magnificently but did not spare his horse; when galloping, the Russian horseman does not raise his

body in the saddle, the entire weight of his upper body bears down on the horse, cleaving almost immovably to his mount. After galloping, the horses came to a dead stop, neighed and snorted. The young soldier didn't understand my reply and repeated the question. Now – more distinctly, breaking the word into syllables – I said: "*pisatiel*." I didn't know any Russian, but I had learned this word because the rumor was that the Russians do not harm writers. And, in fact, the youth did break into a smile. The smile brightened up his young, proud, boyishly angry, ruddy-cheeked face.

"*Kharasho*," he said. "*Idi domoi*".

He jumped off his horse and rushed toward the parish hall. I understood he had dismissed me and I could go home. His comrades paid no attention to me. I hurried across the snow-covered yard and started out on the highway for the village house on the edge of a forest where I had been living for eight months. The house stood in a sort of no-man's land, in a large garden, on the border of a settlement made up of half-village and half-summer places. I lived with escapees and refugees throughout these eight months. The lodgings on the forest's edge proved to be a proper choice. At this time, the Germans no more stuck their noses here than did the Hungarian Nazis and members of the new Arrow-Cross squads trained to conduct man-hunts.

I hurried along the Danube's bank back to the abandoned house. The Danube was full of drifting ice floes. Two days earlier the Germans had withdrawn from the village and the entire area, unseen and unheard. On this day, the Russians had not yet completely encircled Budapest, and modern weapons of every type battled at the Danube's upper bend around Esztergom and then directly across on the other side of the river's bank. Russian artillery dubbed Stalin pipe organs and extraordinary and very effective mortars

poured out a torrent of fire night and day. But it was relatively quiet on the right side of the river. Occasionally we caught a grenade, and sometimes a bomb, dropped absent-mindedly or mistakenly from some lost airplane, would demolish a house in the village.

The Russians had occupied the island in the middle of the river days before. We observed them from the bank as they crawled around in the snow, building military positions, but on the second day of Christmas not a single Soviet patrol had blundered into our village. On the morning of this day, rumor had it that a Russian outpost had – at a major's command – moved several kilometers farther on and occupied a former diplomat's house in the vicinity of a little town nearby. The villagers thought it would be a good idea for a delegation to go to the regular Russian army – with poppy seed and nut brioche and brandy – and ask the major to station a professional military patrol in our village, too; perhaps this way we could avoid abuses at the hands of loitering, looting bands of soldiers. The major promised to dispatch a patrol by nightfall, and he ordered the delegation to gather up all the weapons in the village. I was in the act of taking a hunting rifle to the parish hall when I encountered my first Russian soldier.

I trudged along the Danube's bank. It was growing dark. On the other bank of the river, in the dusk, blue, red, yellow and green flares crackled up high, like skyrockets on a special national holiday – the signals of the Russian infantry slowly advancing toward Pest with which they requested shellfire to cover their forward positions. The shellfire sounded close, and occasionally a rifle bullet whizzed past my ear. This whizzing sound was strange and unmistakable, but I had heard so many of them by this time that I paid no attention to it.

Village acquaintances passed by me in the dark; they recognized and greeted me in perturbed

tones. In this locality were strangely mingled the most impoverished peasantry who barely survived doing coter's work and the summer residences of well-to-do big city dwellers. On the hillside huts stood in rows; along the Danube, summer houses built after the First World War by the thriving middle class according to their diffuse tastes and in an odd hodge-podge of styles made a resplendent display, like some eccentric amusement park. Here were found Tyrolean houses, mansion-like summer villas constructed in gentry-empire style, imitations of Normandy castles, and even Spanish garden homes reminiscent of South American haciendas. Few persons lived in the houses of the gentry; most of the owners had gone to the big city for the siege, because conventional wisdom held that Budapest "will fall in a few days" and in the city "the inhabitants will face field marshals," while in the village corporals will govern, and that will be more dangerous. In reality, one situation was just as dangerous as the other, but those who crowded into Budapest at the time of the siege shriveled and baked in the cellars of the beleaguered city and experienced every horror of a large city's destruction. Many residents of the manorial houses in the village escaped to the West, and their homes were the first to be ransacked by the Russians, just as they had been by the locals.

Each and every person greeting me confusedly in the dark belonged to the village's proletariat. Their confusion suggested that the great change, the "historical moment" did not evoke the experience of "liberation" in their souls. A people that had already lived in servitude for so long seemed to know that their lot was not going to change: the old masters had left, and the new masters had arrived, and they would remain slaves as before.

The local shoemaker, who even for some time past had the reputation of being a Communist, hurried after me breathing heavily and began an emotional,

confused discourse. The fat man stood without an overcoat in the biting cold and explained agitatedly to me that when the Russians marched in and caught sight of him at the edge of the village, they shouted, "Bourgeois, bourgeois!" — and pulled off his leather coat, which he just happened to be wearing, shoved two hundred pengős in paper money into his hands, patted the terror-stricken man on the back, and galloped on. "They thought I was a bourgeois," he explained in a whimpering voice, "because I am fat and have a leather coat. And I was waiting for them..." This was the first time I heard the voice of disappointment.

3

The house was dark. We had been without electricity for two days, and soon it wouldn't be available for months on end. We still had some firewood; we had flour, fifteen kilos. I had buried lard in bottles in the vineyard, twelve of them, and we still had soap and also some coffee. Extra clothing still turned up; I had hidden our remaining money, four thousand pengős, in the attic under a main beam, in a flat Lucky Strike tin box so mice would not nibble them; at the time, this money was enough for two months. On that day I even had some cigarettes.

The household went to bed. I brewed some coffee and sat alone in the dark room before the slowly dying fire in the stove. I remember this night sharply, more vividly and powerfully than many things that happened later. Something had ended, an impossible situation had dissolved into a new, equally dangerous but entirely different state of affairs. The Russian soldier who entered my life today was, naturally, someone other than a ruddy-cheeked Slav youth from somewhere on the Volga. This Russian soldier — I had to think of this — entered not just my life this afternoon

with every consequence, but that of all Europe as well. We didn't know about Yalta yet. What we did know was that the Russians were here, the Germans had withdrawn, and the war would soon be over. I understood this much about what had happened.

And I also understood that we must now answer a question. I couldn't put the question into words, but on this particular night, when a warrior from the East entered a dark Hungarian village – we “understand” only what we see and touch – I felt in my bones that this young Soviet soldier had brought a question to Europe with him.

At the time, the world for nearly thirty years had pondered, loudly and silently, what Communism was, what its meaning was. Those who replied gave very different answers, depending on interest, conviction, political creed, great power positions. Many lied, exaggerated. But then I spoke with those who didn't lie and read books which – the author's person furnishing the proof – did not exaggerate. In any case, I lived in an atmosphere in which Communism was considered one of the Seven Deadly Sins. This was why I thought the moment had arrived for me to forget everything I had ever heard about the Russians and the Communists. At the moment when – in the snowy, dark courtyard of the parish house – I first encountered a Soviet soldier, there also began in my life personally the great examination, the process of question and answer, the assessment of the Communist and non-Communist worlds; but this examination commenced simultaneously in the Western world as well. A power had appeared in Europe, and the Red Army was only the military expression of this power. What was this power? What was Communism? The Slavs? The East? ...

In the night, muttering men walked around the house, came and left. The night loiterers spoke a foreign language. I sat in the dark room and decided

that, to the extent humanly possible, I would purge my judgment of every bias and try to look at the Communists without any residual memories of my readings and conversations, without any of the preconceptions of official anti-Bolshevist propaganda.

That afternoon I had personally undergone an event which the so-called "intellectual" had lived through as a similar "experience" in Europe only twice up to then: in the ninth century, when the Arabs suddenly broke through to Autun and Poitiers, and in the sixteenth century, when the Turks transmigrated to Győr and Erlau. The Easterners were not allowed to advance farther into Europe then either. The maraudings and conquests of the Genghis Khans, the Timur Lenks, and the Attilas in the European plains were tragic but fleeting interludes, and one day, without so much as stopping to think, these hordes scurried home from Europe at some magical sign of some Asiatic tribal calamity. The Arabs, on the other hand, launched an attack with an ideological, racial, and spiritual consciousness against another ideological, racial and spiritual consciousness, against Christianity, and when Charles Martel, the bastard, defeated them at Autun for good, they left in Europe not just the memory of their looting but also the great questions of Arab civilization that demanded answers. They brought with them not only astronomy, navigation, medical science, new kinds of ornamentation and the Eastern view of nature, but also a numerical system that made technical thought possible when it banished the complex and cumbersome numbers of the Greek and Roman numerical systems. They brought with them the self-consciousness of Hellenism, which by then was barely flickering in the dim cells and encapsulated souls of the Medieval scholastics, when, finally, Gerhard of Cremona translated several dozen Greek learned and literary works into Latin, including nearly all of Aristotle. To this "barbarian," to this first Eastern question, the

Christian world would give a good answer at Autun; it answered not only with cannon but with the Renaissance and Humanism, which would, perhaps, not have emitted sparks in the soul of Medieval man for centuries without the impetus of Arab civilization's Hellenistic, Aristotelian self-consciousness.

The Renaissance was, in any event, a response to the first massive Eastern ideological invasion. On the occasion of the second Eastern assault, at the powerful onslaught of the Osman world concept and Eastern imperialism, the Christian world would again reply not only with weapons but with a great attempt at renewal, the Reformation. How will my world, the Western world, respond to this young Russian soldier who today arrived from the East and asked me, an unknown European writer: "Who are you?"

I sat in the darkness, in this very strange darkness, listening to the cannon-fire rumbling in the night with the monotony of factory gear and destroying everything that, a few kilometers away, was for me not long ago still a home and a world concept; and I tried to figure out the tone of the question that the healthy blond Slavic soldier wearing a quilted Chinese coat would address to my world. I did not think about the "answer," because I knew that such "answers" cannot be determined. The humanists didn't "determine" the Renaissance either, nor did Luther "determine" the Reformation; such "answers" just happen somehow. Nonetheless, I tried to figure out what the Russian soldier really wanted of me.

He will, of course, carry off the pigs, the wheat, the oil, the coal and the machines; there was no doubt about that. (At the time I didn't suspect he would take people away, too.) But what does he want besides the pigs, wheat and oil? Does he want my "soul" and thus my personality, too? Not much time passed before this question resounded very powerfully not just within me in the night and in the secluded village house. We

came to know that he wanted to take away all these things and, on top of it all, he wanted our "souls," our personalities. When we became aware of this, the encounter took on a different meaning, one that extended beyond the fate of a nation to that of the whole world.

Vast empires wither away more quickly than tropical forests; history is replete with the skeletons of such mammoth hulks as the Seleucian, Nubian and Libyan Empires — they bloomed for a few historical moments, then dust buried them all without a trace. Only a lunatic could believe that the fate of thousand-year-old Hungary has any significance for the large masses of peoples. If Hungary stands in the way, they will trample it underfoot, without anger, indifferently. If they can make use of Hungary for a moment, they will sign it on in some sort of subordinate role, just as the Germans "signed it on" yesterday, as the Russians will "sign it on" tomorrow. This is destiny, and a small nation can do very little against it. But to the question that the young Russian Bolshevik brought into my life — into the lives of everyone raised in the life forms of Western civilization — one must answer without prejudice and bias. I imagined I saw the strange, impassive young face in the darkness. It wasn't repugnant, but it was frightfully strange.

At this moment, in this phase of the war, I wasn't the only one to reflect anxiously on the Russians: a "bourgeois" Hungarian writer in a house in a Hungarian village. The English, French and Americans were also eyeing them with dubious expectations. At the cost of terrible sacrifices at Stalingrad, a great people turned around the wagon shaft of world history, and I had this very day encountered an embodiment of this great power. To many, to those persecuted by the Nazis, this young Russian brought along a kind of liberation, an escape from the Nazi terror.

But he couldn't bring freedom with him because he didn't have any. At the time, this was not yet widely known.

4

For two weeks they came randomly and sporadically, singly or in pairs. They generally asked for something: wine, food, sometimes just for a glass of water. After the initial anxiety, these encounters sometimes took place in a human voice, true, in a somewhat theatrical and studied voice. Once the rudiments of greetings and communications were clarified, only scant conversational possibilities remained to us. Staying in the house was a young woman who completed her university degree in Prague and spoke the Czech idiom fluently. She was our interpreter, and the Russians understood her for the most part.

They entered the house night and day without ringing or knocking. During the first days and nights, we were sometimes taken aback when, at the most unexpected moment, a Russian with a submachine gun stood before our bed or beside our table. But we became used to that quickly, too. Most of them stayed for only a short time.

Once three of them arrived, two officer types, or *kapitanos*, and a private. As we later learned, the officer rank started with majors in the Russian army; they had already completed the military academy and had orderlies, and most of them knew a little German. But below the rank of major, the officer types with several stars were not real officers. Also present were other ranks and relations between superiors and subordinates that a foreigner could understand only with difficulty. There was the "political officer" who monitored the regular soldiers on assignment from the Party, but it could also be presumed that the "political officer" himself had a monitor within the army. Some years be-

fore, at the beginning of the war, I read a book published in Switzerland whose author, a Russian named Basseneff, tried to draw a picture of the Soviet "People's Army." I now recollected this book, but I found the reality much more complicated than the one this Russian military writer delineated.

For instance, these three visitors held ranks hard to define in Western military terms. They were young – the private was a doltish sleigh driver, the officer types were mildly tipsy. They arrived about noon, and I tried to receive them politely, sociably, because I had already sensed that this way of treatment pacified my Russian guests the most effectively. I extended my hand, offered them a seat, treated them to my remaining cigarettes and brandy, and then waited to see what would happen. Sometimes the politeness, the external forms of hospitality, affected the Russians favorably. Generally, they arrived with great hubbub to search for "guns" and "Hermanns," that is Germans, but after the first polite words and hospitable gestures, they grew tame. That's what happened now. When I raised the brandy glass and toasted their health, all three stood up and courteously returned the greeting with glasses in their hands. Then we sat around the crested tile stove and began conversing – exactly like billeted soldiers and locals during military exercises. Members of my family – my wife and a little boy, who was staying in the house at the time, and the young woman who spoke a Slavic language – sat with the guests. The situation was strange and different from what we expected on the basis of fugitives' alarming tales. I began to hope.

This hopefulness, at first, was not without cause. We got along without extraordinary damage and tragic mishaps with the officers and orderlies of the regular army, especially if they weren't drunkards, and there was also a high military command nearby. In the first days, some looters turned up, but they

were more like pilfering sneak thieves in the night who arrived armed and demanded watches, liquor, and cologne, and promptly took to their heels with the booty. Clearly, the thieves had an uneasy conscience because they feared punishment by the local high command. But in the early days, regular soldiers, especially the officers, sometimes behaved considerately here in the little village, but differently in the big city nearby where open robbery and violent acts were authorized undertakings.

The three young men sat sociably around the large earthenware stove. The driver was hopelessly stupid, but he, too, made an effort to be well-mannered, visibly imitating the *kapitanos'* behavior. They related what occupations they followed as civilians — one was a draftsman — and they asked me what my profession was. This was my first lengthy conversation with Soviet men, and I again saw that the “writer” is a magical notion among Russians. At the moment when I said I am a writer, they looked at me with great respect and attentiveness, as if I were some extraordinary being. They looked around my room, whose modest furniture — some kind of bungalow furnishing — didn't really make a grand impression (the house wasn't mine, I had moved in eight months ago at the request of friends), and they were visibly affected by everything they saw. The younger *kapitano*, the draftsman, said he was very pleased to have the opportunity to meet me because he “likes persons” like me. Then they wanted to know if the house belonged to me. When I said it didn't, they began asserting enthusiastically what a splendid lot Soviet writers enjoyed; they kept saying that in the Soviet Union I would have a house, a garden, and a car by now. The older *kapitano* waxed unduly enthusiastic and asked if I wanted to move into one of the more splendid upper-class houses in the locality, because he would be glad to present it to me as a gift. Laughing, I turned down the offer.

All this was childish and strange, of course, but I really didn't understand this veneration of writers. I did my best to find out what they knew about Russian and world literature. To my question they answered "everything" with voluble verbosity, because at home, in the Soviet Union, "everybody reads." When I interrogated them and wanted to know details, one of them uttered Pushkin's name, another Lermontov's. Later I noticed that most of them had heard these two names, especially Pushkin's, that for them the memory of compulsory readings in school rested in these names. They nodded on hearing the names of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, but it was apparent that these two names meant nothing to them. While we were talking, one of them, the boozier, kept reaching for the young female interpreter; but at a single glance from me he let go of her hand, and his comrade, the draftsman, said something to him in a reproachful voice. Thereafter all three of them behaved properly. We shook hands in farewell, and I saw them out to the garden gate – it still had one then – and I stood there until they got into the sleigh. They were in good humor and young; the green sleigh – heaven knows where they picked up this vehicle – and the jingling harness of the troika around the horse's neck: the whole scene looked like some serene engraving from the time of the Napoleonic wars.

They drove away amid infernal jingling, and at the turn at the bottom of the garden, they began shooting wildly and firing their submachine guns into the air randomly. Teenagers, I thought, as the sleigh disappeared on the snowy road in a cloud of fog: teenagers, juveniles. I went back to the house, and we discussed the strange visit in detail.

Our anxiety abated. The Russians, it seemed, were not as dangerous as reputed ... we all shared this hope optimistically. I quoted what Stendhal wrote about them when they retreated from Kiev escorted by Napoleon: "*Cet océan de barbarie puante.*" The reality,

we hoped, would be different. True, these young men were uneducated, but why should the soldiers of an Eastern army be particularly educated? Anyway, they were healthy, good-humored, and open-minded. In addition, they, too, respected writers. "Let's not forget," I said to the members of the household, "that they come from the East, where at the time of the Assyrians, of Hammurabi, writing had a god: *Nabu* was his name." This was how we cracked jokes.

In any case, the question of why the notion of the "writer" was so magical to the Russians stirred my interest. One day, in the morning, a Russian field officer, a major or a lieutenant colonel, arrived at our place with a large retinue of officers; they wore leather coats, splendid boots, fur gloves, flat officer's hats, and the gold-bar insignia of rank on their shoulders. The major spoke German fluently. They didn't sit down; they came from the villa next door, where they had been treated to lunch. They heard there that a writer was living in the neighboring house and came over to take a look at this rare bird. The visit didn't last long, but it was intense. The major stood in the middle of the room in the semi-circle of his officers, with his riding-whip in his hand. Binoculars hung on his chest from a leather strap, and he looked like a general in a school book. He asked me if I was the writer. Then he looked me over. He motioned to one of the officers to photograph me. My typewriter stood on the table with a newly begun manuscript. Firmly but courteously he asked if I was at work and on what. I replied that under present conditions of life I was not able to take on demanding literary tasks, but that I was working on my journal, as before, in peace and war. He nodded as if he understood this perfectly and inquired whether I record everything I am now experiencing in my journal. "Not everything," I said, "only what I consider of vital importance."

"Then record," he said gravely and firmly, "that

an army officer came to see you and did not harm you. Also record that this Russian army officer saw Tolstoy's residence in Yasnaya Polyana, which your country's soldiers had completely turned upside down. Will you record that?" he asked sternly.

I promised to take note of that, too. (It was not a situation in which I could start an argument with a Russian officer, and so I didn't tell him that last night Russian soldiers ransacked Zsigmond Móricz's garden house and trampled on the manuscripts scattered on the floor with their muddy boots. This is what war is like; it is always hideous, and muddy boots always trample on manuscripts in a strange country.) He looked around for a while, then shrugged his shoulders, raised his hand to the peak of his cap, saluted gravely, turned on his heel, signaled his officers, and they left. I looked after them in astonishment. I now fulfill the promise I made then.

This was different from what we expected, so completely different and surprising that I became cautious, like someone who has lost his way in the dark and is unable to find the road sign. What kind of people are they? For, a short time later, a maid from the neighboring villa ran over and reported that these very same Russian officers who had dined at their place just a little while ago kissed the hand of the lady of the house, said goodbye graciously, came over to our house to look at a writer, and when they departed, they sent back the chauffeur armed with a submachine gun from the highway to the villa, to their hosts, to demand that the master of the house hand over his gold wristwatch. The aggrieved man, who naively wore it and looked at it frequently during lunch in his guests' presence, later confirmed the news. "But then why did they kiss my wife's hand?" he asked, bewildered. We began to suspect that there was something astounding in the Russians.

Several Jewish refugees who lay hidden in the

village through the months the Germans and the Hungarian Arrow Cross persecuted the Jews now ventured forth. An old man and his family lived close by; he was a pharmacist, a well-to-do bourgeois who had escaped pursuit by the Arrow Cross. But the women in his family were afraid of the Russians. At the time the first Russian visitor arrived, the old man – he had a white beard and was a venerable patriarchal figure – stopped solemnly in front of him and disclosed he was a Jew. The scene that followed was astonishing. On hearing the disclosure, the Russian soldier broke into a smile, removed the submachine gun from his neck, walked up to the old man, and, according to Russian custom, kissed him gently – from right to left – on the cheeks. He said he was a Jew, too. For a time he silently and heartily squeezed the old man's hand.

Then he hung the submachine gun around his neck again and ordered the old gentleman to stand in the corner of the room with his entire family and to turn with raised hands toward the wall. When the old man didn't understand the order immediately, the soldier shouted at them to comply right away or he would shoot them dead. The women and the old man stood in the corner of the room, their faces turned to the wall. After this, the Russian robbed them slowly, at his leisure. He was an expert. With the skill of a wall-demolishing burglar he tapped the tile stove and walls from one end to the other and pulled out every drawer. He found the family's hidden jewels and all their cash, about forty thousand pengős. He put everything into his pocket and left.

5

The Russian soldiers sniffed out wine like hounds pursuing wild game. They pounded the length of the basement flooring with their rifle butts – in

many places vintners had buried their wine barrels, but the Russians quickly got the hang of searching for them – and they dug carefully where the flooring gave a dull thud until they found the wine. The momentum of the Russian attack also stalled on two battlefronts: when the Soviet forces reached a wine district, their officers could only drive them on at the cost of bringing in new troops. This was what occurred in the Mátra and Balaton wine regions. All their behavior showed this unpredictable quality.

It occurred that the Russian who dropped by in the morning, conversed amiably with a family, showed pictures of his own family back home sentimentally, patted the heads of the children present in the room and gave them candy and apples, departed and then returned in the afternoon or late at night and robbed the very same family he had made friends with in the morning. Since the power of the human imaginative faculty was keyed up during these days and later, I naturally didn't believe all the stories circulating about the Russians' behavior, and I am now recording only what I personally experienced or what I am convinced actually took place.

It is certain that the "writer" was a magical idea for most Russians – just as the actor, the doctor, sometimes the priest, too! – but it was equally certain that this magical word did not always carry magical power for them. A Russian officer who turned up one morning demanded flour from me – naturally locals, neighbors sent him who knew we had a little flour stashed away – and the argument that he had stumbled upon a writer's house carried no weight at all. He found the flour and carried it off, muttering furiously. Not a single morsel of bread was to be found in the house around New Year's. It was then I learned that need is more powerful than gold. At daybreak I headed with a ferryman and a dilapidated punt across the Danube full of drift-ice to a place on the island just oppo-

site, on the basis of a rumor that the miller there sold flour for gold. I found the village Shylock – a Swabian with a bloated, purple-blue face – in the mill and placed before him without a word a small gold-plated woman's Swiss wristwatch, one of our last remaining earthly treasures. The miller understood not only flour but gold as well; he sprang open the cover of the watch case with the technical deftness of a jeweler and looked at the assay mark of the gold watch worriedly. It was fine gold, eighteen karats. He sighed and handed it back with a scornful gesture. "I have no flour," he said, spreading his arms helplessly. "The Russians carried it off during the night."

And we veritably stood there helplessly – the gold-hungry miller and I, the flour-hungry writer – in the middle of a world situation. I went home empty-handed, and as the punt swam through the drift-ice toward the other side – that morning heavy cannonfire was sweeping along both banks of the river, the Russians were heading toward Pest with a large force – I reflected on the strange life situation I found myself in. In this moment I came to understand something about the gravity of the life lived by ancient bourgeois pioneers.

A good many of exceptions cropped up, but in the first two weeks – thanks to the presence of the Russian high command that established itself in the village – I very generally got along with the Russians who called on us. More often than not, a nice manner, an affable intonation won them over. The trust presented in advance, then the refusal, the adult intonation – that of an elder speaking to a young person – mixing these with the resigned voice of a defeated person – all this sometimes affected them. Not the meaning of the words – I could barely speak to them even with the help of an interpreter – it was rather the tone only, the manner, the look that made an impression on them. Sometimes, making them tractable

was exhausting, for they showed up day and night, singly or in small bands, on foot and on horseback. I would go into the vestibule and quite frequently find horses there peacefully looking around, while their masters, the Cossacks, bustled about in the kitchen searching for liquor or something to eat. Humans are resilient creatures, and I quickly learned how to show the uninvited guests to the door: I spoke abruptly, in the very same tone to the horses and the horsemen, and they not infrequently left. After such scenes, I felt like a *dompteur* after a successfully executed lion act. But, actually, they weren't lions or wild beasts, just childlike, simple men.

And since the Russian army was assembled from exceptionally numerous races, the differentiation appeared hopeless, and the generalization that included under the generic term "Russian" all the human phenomena we came to know was irresponsible. Even to this day I cannot distinguish accurately between a White Russian and a Ukrainian, though, it is said, the temperamental, cultural and human differences between them are significant. During these weeks, we became acquainted with the soldiers of the Second Ukrainian Army, and this military organization was made up of astonishingly diverse elements: there were Easterners, slant-eyed yellow men with Chinese mustaches, Tartars and Mongols; there were gray-eyed blond Siberians. There were Cossacks, who also rode fabulously; I myself watched two Cossacks casually ride up twelve garden stairs leading to the neighboring villa ... There were many types: perplexing, unknown and inexplicable.

They were mainly full of surprises, a little like children and like a completely different human race whose reflexes and responses didn't make any sense. An old lady, the widow of a minister of state, was living in a nearby house with her servants. The cultured old woman, the descendant of a German reigning fam-

ily, led a solitary life amid beautiful Empire furnishings. One of her ancestors fought against Napoleon at the side of Kutuzov, and this German general was honored with a niche in the group of statues memorializing Kutuzov and his war comrades in a Moscow square. In the first days of the Russian occupation, the old lady based her future on this connection. In fact, one day, when a Russian colonel and his orderly were billeted in her home, she put on her finery, and with a picture showing the statues in her hand, she looked up her guest and requested protection. The colonel heard her out, examined the photo of the Kutuzov statue closely, then ordered her to move into the kitchen with her servants because he, the colonel, wanted to reside alone in the inner rooms. The old lady did so, but she didn't take any offense at it. She ranked among the self-possessed; she settled in the kitchen on a servant's iron bed. She read *Chartreuse de Parme* and received friends there regally and pleasantly in the mornings, like Marie Antoinette in the Conciergerie cellar. And so it happened that after the colonel left — the old lady stayed on in the kitchen because she harbored the suspicion that the attacks would go on for a long time — a private with a bad leg showed up at her place. He arrived toward night-time and asked permission to wash his leg and to sleep in the kitchen with the women. Unable to do anything about it, they made the best of it. The night passed quietly. In the morning, the Russian thanked her for the hospitality and then demanded that she give him, the Russian, a confirmation, a "bumashka" in German! something in writing, that he had spent the night in the village house. Once again, "writing" was important to the Russian: the "bumashka," that mystical something, "letters." The old woman explained in vain that her verification would be worthless, that, indeed, it was hard to understand what sort of defense or proof an enemy national's, an old woman's acknowledgment, written in German for a

vagrant Russian soldier separated from his company, could signify in the eyes of Soviet authorities. But it wasn't possible to negotiate with the visitor; he insisted on the "writing," which he received. Then he left, satisfied; as a token of his gratitude he put several decagrams of candy in a paper bag on the kitchen table in the astonished women's presence.

6

They were childlike, sometimes wild, sometimes edgy and melancholy, always unpredictable. Since I could not do anything else anyway, I decided to keep at my profession, and so, after the first surprises, I began observing them, and wrote down briefly what I experienced. Not long ago I read over these notes, and even after reading them, I can only repeat what I set down on several occasions at the time: there is "something different" about the Russians that someone raised in the West cannot understand. I won't pass judgment on this "something different," I won't even assess or disparage it. I shall simply establish what it is.

When I come face to face with someone from the West – a Frenchman, Englishman, American or German, say – I can by and large figure out the primary reflexes ensuing from the situation and the moment within the situation itself independent of his personality. But I could never decipher the Russians' primary reflexes and even less so those of the second or third degree. I wasn't the only one who looked at them with such ignorance, everyone in the Western world who encountered them during this period did so, and they, too, the Russians, watched us closely. The Russians walked with piercing looks among us; a primitive people with powerful impulses watched us warily.

The magic word "writer" wasn't always effectual, and I couldn't entertain the hope that the sol-

diers of the Red Army hanging around during the siege of Budapest would spend time attending literary seminars in my room in an abandoned country house. But a Russian always turned up who looked at me with respectful, reverential regard when I introduced myself. And because I needed protection on the occasions of these visits that were not wholly without danger, and because the Russians were extremely suspicious and didn't believe I really was a writer, and I, secretly, in the depth of my soul, shared their doubt then and even more so since, I was compelled to look for some kind of certificate that would confirm my audacious claim to my skeptical visitors. And because a trustworthy "bumashka" verifying that someone is a "writer" is issued nowhere in the world, I was glad to find a French edition of one of my books in the small reference library of the owners of the house. My name was on the title page, and on the back of the book, the publisher fortuitously included among the advertisements, in a list of its publications, a noted Soviet writer named Ilya Ehrenburg and the title of one of his novels.

During our literary conversations at this time, I had already noticed that the Russians generally were not telling the truth when they boasted of being widely read, but I also found that among Soviet writers it was the name of this Ilya Ehrenburg they were most likely to know. I later learned that at this time he often wrote for the army in camp newspapers officially distributed and also in other Russian publications, so that even those knew his name who hadn't read any of his books.

One night toward dawn, a dishevelled, bearded, ill-tempered Russian arrived, a Kirghiz or some other Eastern type; he asked for something, wine or bacon, and when I didn't give him what he asked for, he began grumbling irritably. He gripped his submachine gun and shouted unintelligible words in a threatening

voice. The situation was turning hostile. I decided to resort to the last recourse of defense: I introduced myself. But the Russian was suspicious. "Writer?" he asked distrustfully and grumpily. "What kind of writer?" I took the French book off the shelf, showed him my name, then pointed to myself, and said with the help of the interpreter: "Leave, because, as you see, you have got into a writer's house by mistake. See, I wrote this book. Here is my name. But that's not all," — I turned the book over — "I'm not just an ordinary writer but one whose books were published at the same time as those of a famous Russian writer. See, you can read Ilya Ehrenburg's name here." The short, bearded Russian was still suspicious. He bent over the book with the weapon in his hand, spelled out the name on the back, and asked with a black look and skeptical voice:

"Ilya Ehrenburg?"

"Yes," I said. "How about that?"

He looked me over from head to foot. Then he flung out his arms, threw his head back, and shrugged his shoulders.

"Propagandist!" he said contemptuously.

He turned and left the room. I stared after him with my mouth open. This man, it seemed, understood literature and had heard something about the difference between a writer and a propagandist.

But this and other kinds of encounters could not enlighten me about that "difference" I sensed in the Russians: what it was that set them apart from the people of the West. For they were different, not like a Hindu or a Chinese, but I am certain that a German peasant, an English repairman, a French veterinary or an Italian housepainter would reply differently from them to the prime questions about life in the *attitudinal* sense. We watched one another closely, for the Russians also kept an eye on us. They watched us not only in the "manor houses." They didn't take a look at just

the accessories of bourgeois life; they were interested in those, but they also looked around and observed the poor in their abodes, and it was apparent that what they found there was not only unfamiliar but also astonishing and amazing to them. What was this "difference"? Was it the "Soviet man," actually, and thus a new, engendered and conditioned human breed who discerned and surveyed the world and humanity from a different perspective? Or was the Russian simply someone who, not for the first time in history, but now, it seemed, emerged with all its consequences from his Eurasian home and headed for the world to prowl about a bit, wary but curious? I couldn't come up with an answer.

Of course, they had the piglets and the flour carted away, but there was nothing remarkable about this, not even typical. At this time they also had the bicycles on the highway carried off; they pedaled them for a while and then threw them away or gave them to someone as a gift. Their obvious penchant for collecting watches couldn't be explained easily either. They actually demanded watches with a collector's passion; there were Russians who rolled up their coat sleeves and proudly put on their most recently stolen trophies next to the four or five wristwatches already on their arm. In the First World War, I was acquainted with some Russian prisoners of war — officers, peasants, and workers — but not one of them was so passionately interested in watches. What was going on here, why did the time machine engage the Russians' interest so fervidly? I recollected Spengler's observation, who asserted in his great pessimistic work that the people of a harmonious and lively culture have no awareness of "recording," thus of time measured in moments; the Chinese and the Greeks feel and think in large time perspectives, the *Olympian* being proof of this indifference to time as a unit of measurement, but when a culture comes to a period of crisis, that civilization, in

short the principle of utility, occasions the same feelings of panic in the souls of human beings, and it is then that the anxious measuring of time commences. It is possible that Soviet industrial experimentation elicited this feeling for time. I couldn't say. It was more likely that there weren't enough watch factories in the Soviet Union, and the muzhik developed a fancy for this special toy. Or more simply, the watch was the one valuable that could be bartered most easily. Since I am speaking about the Russians, I can't give a definite answer.

Their coming and going, visits, vanishings — everything about them — was baffling and unpredictable. Days passed without our seeing a single Russian; then, unexpectedly, they would arrive en masse. They would pass through the village in motor vehicles, but in other ways as well, in wagons, disheveled, like Gypsies. It wasn't only the service corps that advanced like this; the infantry also had itself transported in countless wagons. Privates, officers, woman soldiers, and boy soldiers, twelve and thirteen years old, in regular uniforms with insignia of rank lay stretched out on the straw. I didn't see any chaplains among the troops, but it's possible I just didn't recognize them.

The Germans always advanced with mechanized detachments, as if the Krupp factory had sallied forth; even the stacks of their field-kitchens spewed smoke as if cannon barrels had been converted to this purpose. The Russians had everything required to wage war; but what they had was "different," — not as mechanized and systematically regulated. It was as if a monstrous, dreadful, enigmatic Eastern traveling circus had set out from the distance, from the dim remoteness, from the East, from Russia. This traveling circus was, in reality, one of the largest military machines on earth. And those who led it did so incomprehensibly but magnificently in the eyes of foreigners: everything was in its place, everything func-

tioned in the apparent confusion; mysterious supervisors and monitors gave timely signals about everything to one another within the great machine.

Their intelligence network, information service, transmission of commands, and internal procedures could not be detected. But seemingly, everything in the Russian army happened in accord with some very ancient system; the warfare experiences of the Genghis Khans, Tatars, and the Golden Horde manifested themselves in the systematic way they marched, moved on, ate, threw bridges across rivers, pitched tents and then suddenly disappeared at some mysterious signal. The warfare of the ancient Magyars and Huns may have been like this; Scythian patrols galloped like this, not sparing the horse, and every forty kilometers – so scholars say – a garrison and fresh mounts awaited the horsemen, who tore open their tethered horse's arteries, drank its blood for a brief time measured by an hourglass, and then quickly sewed up the horse's wound and galloped on... These Russians were closer to nature than the soldiers in the Western armies: even as the chiefs of the ancient Mongolian armies arrayed their forces galloping on white and different-colored horses by the course of the moon in a certain eastern or northern line of attack – heaven knows what sort of streamlining war technique this was millennia ago! – so these later descendants of the Mongols were still able to perceive a measure of nature's power to support or obstruct.

It is difficult for me to speak about this because I can't substantiate it, but during the months when I lived in the closest intimacy night and day with the Russians, I distinctly felt, perceived something of this kind. All this constituted the "difference." Moreover, they were cunning, crafty and scornfully and maliciously guileful; they were happy if they could fool us, the "Westerners." They were filled with childish joy if they saw us taken in. I had many dealings with the

Russians then and sometimes later as well, but not once did a Russian who asked me for something and promised earnestly to return what he borrowed – a tool, book, any worthless article – ever keep his word. And if I called on them to fulfill the promise, they laughed happily and openly in my face because, well, being smarter, they had outwitted me.

I remember some strange characters: a young soldier who, on patrol, is riding a horse on the Danube's bank in the foggy January dawn, and the trotting and the face of the Mongolian horseman – all this is coming from so a great distance that I stop along the road and follow the apparition with my eyes for a long time. This horseman clearly isn't "different" from the others, he isn't an individual. He is the Mongolian horseman, and he has for millennia trotted like this in his quilted Chinese coat on the banks of the Volga or some other river, and he will ride his horse with the same impassivity if one day he should be sent out on patrol in the Pyrenees. He does not so much as glance at his surroundings; an absolute indifference is reflected in the Mongolian face. On another occasion, two straggling horsemen are plodding along, a sort of Zoro and Huru – one gangling, the other paunchy and stubby, like Sancho Panza. They are singing and making gloomy, ridiculous faces. Struggling and mimicking themselves, they amble along the highway, and when they reach me, they howl whoops into my face that suggest the braying of a jackass; then, shrugging their shoulders, they move on, two country buffoons.

They liked to play, to act a lot. But their idea of acting was also "different." It lacked any awareness of *homo ludens* or the civilized reflex of *Commedia dell'arte*; in every one of their impromptu amusements there was a bit of sorcery, something tribal, ritualistic – and for this reason, they were somewhat frightening when they started to play.

Sometimes officers showed up with whom we

could converse at length and seriously, in German, too. Naturally, I didn't inquire about their life and lot at home, because they would have misunderstood my purpose. Rather, it seemed most sensible for me to nibble at the only topic of conversation that I could check out – literature. They answered my questions vaguely, sometimes stupidly, mostly with misinformation, but then sometimes with amazing intelligence. Since many of them tended to tell lies, I accepted as true only answers containing factual proof that the person I asked knew what he was talking about.

7

I took special pains to learn what had trickled down to them from that great Russian literature that could in the early decades of the century so profoundly stir the Russian people and the entire thinking world. And so I wasn't content with my visitors' halting assertions in which they claimed, like automatons, that they had read "everything;" instead, I pressed for details. At such times, the most common answer was an uninformative hemming and hawing. Russian Communist propaganda persuaded the world to believe – at least those sometimes well-meaning sympathizers who fell for this line – that the revolution had changed the Russian common man's demand for education. Certainly, such a transformation is a grand result; maybe, it isn't worth going through a revolution to achieve it, but a revolution can point to it with pride. I didn't understand the technical, strategic and hierarchical structure of the Red Army, nor did I feel I had the right to draw conclusions about the psyche and world view of the "Soviet man" from such occasional encounters. A great revolution that re-educates its populace for decades in accord with its own ideas and practices involves an exceedingly complex process; in no

way could I, who was at the time not familiar with the practices of this Communist education through personal experience, rightfully reach conclusions about intellectual conditions in the Soviet Union from the behavior and casual comments of the system's pupils.

But I did have a smattering of its literature. Russian literature had nurtured me, too; it gave me pleasure; it filled me with doubts and rapture. And so I was now especially interested in finding out what the "Soviet man" knew about his country's literature – because I was in a position to monitor his answers. After the standard replies – in which the officer I was questioning proudly proclaimed that in the Soviet Union "everybody reads," – I posed questions of detail consistently. When we went beyond identifying Pushkin and Lermontov, most of them knew only their names and couldn't list what these great poets wrote... Using Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, I tried to sound out my visitors' familiarity with the writings of recent and contemporary Russian authors. I was surprised how little these Soviet men knew about their own great literature. I won't mention the answers of the simpletons now, but even those who, it could be verified, completed some kind of Soviet secondary school, contented themselves with a repeating like parrots of Mayakovsky's name and then, to my surprise, Chekhov's, despite his truly "bourgeois" voice and outlook. I understood from their replies only that they did read but superficially, and rather only what was put into their hands in official study groups.

For instance, they clearly didn't know Dostoevsky. They were familiar with his works, the more educated even with the titles of his minor writings, but, it seemed, Dostoevsky didn't belong among the pets of Soviet cultural policy. I never could learn why this was so. Maybe it was his nationalism, maybe his mysticism, his explosive Christianity. I don't venture a conclusion about the matter. But it appeared that, accord-

ing to the official cultural shamans of party politics, Dostoevsky did not fall within the scope of the approved "line." They spoke of Tolstoy with repeated nods of appreciation. And everyone I questioned mentioned Chekhov's name and works with enthusiasm. The great "bourgeois" writer from the end of the century, it seemed, was also officially an approved, favorite and popular writer of the Soviet people. Later, literary scholars explained that Soviet cultural policy approved and supported Chekhov because his irony and mocking attitude unintentionally presented a faithful picture of "bourgeois Russia."

But I could never learn the truth about Dostoevsky. He belonged among the nation's saints, and for this reason, they didn't admit that, in effect, they were treating him as an undesirable element from an intellectual point of view; one could discern that they were trying to protect Soviet youth from the influence of this great genius. They sanctioned Tolstoy, like an ancient monument, like Kutuzov's statue. I was astonished how knowledge of the second vanguard of Russian writers at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth had vanished without a trace from the consciousness of these "Soviet men." Ultimately, in addition to Dostoevsky's and Tolstoy's works, Russian literature was able to produce for the world a second literary frontline whose notables were not literary geniuses by the standards of world literature, but, it is certain, they contributed in their own day many significant and valuable works to the literature of their country and the world. Naturally, I didn't ask Kirghiz cavalymen, Ukrainian repairmen, or White Russian or Siberian trappers whether they had ever heard the names of Osip Dymov, Arkady Averchenko, Artsibashev, Kuprin, Ivan Bunin, Merezhkovsky and Leonid Andreyev; I asked, instead, every officer who was willing to engage in conversation with me. Among the officers I did not encounter a single one

who had ever heard the names of these writers. They murmured in embarrassment, and when I began speaking of the classicists, they stated with relief that they had read the famous work entitled *Dead Souls* and knew who Gogol is; they had heard of Goncharov and proudly asserted that the writings of the "bourgeois" and "Western" Turgenev are read and highly esteemed in the Soviet Union.

Of course, Gorky was the great official author in all their eyes. Many knew about Fadeyev and Marchenko, and, of course, every one of them had heard the name of the previously mentioned Ehrenburg. But I was surprised how quickly the names of several writers whom we, both writers and readers, kept our eyes on in the West had vanished from these contemporaries' memory; for example, not one of my guests had ever heard of Gladkov, the author of *Cement* (and thus they didn't know when and how during the Stalin purges he disappeared, along with a good many comrades, never to be heard from again) and what was even more strange, they had barely heard the name of the important Soviet realist, Sholokhov.

I don't want to generalize. I talked with only a few dozen Red soldiers about Russian literature, and it is certain that many living in that gigantic empire today know this great literature more thoroughly, more intimately than my visitors did. But it is also certain that the literature of a great people – and, what is more, such a rich and profound literature as the Russian – settles down as names and notions in the consciousness of everyone who knows how to read and write and speaks the language of the literature. The Russians honored writers and literature, but those I met during these weeks and later read surprisingly little. All of them spoke of "culture" reverentially – the "narodnaja kultura," the national culture, belonged among the magical words, and when a Russian acted the bully, he sometimes grew tractable when I cast in

his face that he was being unfaithful to the "narodnaja kultura" by behaving that way. But I became aware of the fact that they had no notion of what "culture" really is. During our conversations, they revealed that they mistook culture for some kind of professional, technical knowledge. Still, "culture" excited them, exactly the way "writing" did.

Their felt and expressed interest in "writing" could also be accounted for by the fact that the written word always has magical significance at the beginning of every great primitive venture. Script fixes some dim longing, some mythic notion in primitive man; the myth fixed in script is already history, thus a most responsible experience. These Russians were still far from viewing writing as a contest of wits or — like writers in Western civilization — often only as a commercial commodity or a fashionable pursuit. For most of them, the written word still was completely trustworthy. And that "culture" they spoke of with such reverent intonation, what could it represent to men who were unquestionably uninformed in the Western sense of the word and had not lived through the two great shocks of Western civilization, the Renaissance and the Reformation? It took me some time to understand that secretly, in the depths of their souls, "culture" was for them synonymous with the notion of escape. They still didn't know exactly what it was, but the prospect of the escape that could be realized with the help of culture excited and propelled them. Escape from what? Escape from the bleakness of their lives.

Like the early Christians, they suspected that only a spiritual solution could liberate them from the deep-rooted, hopeless dreariness of their lives, their termite-like existence. They still did not exactly know what the escape that culture promised would be like, but they swarmed toward it like bugs toward light. They still did not know that culture is something other than getting a haircut or not spitting on the floor,

something other than listening to the gramophone, but this something, this prospect, already agitated them. This is why they honored the writer, the doctor, everyone who, in their opinion, lived in the sphere of "culture." The quip made in Budapest, the city of witticisms, that "Stalin made a mistake when he showed the Russians the way to Europe, and he made a mistake when he showed Europe the way to the Russians" contains a measure of truth. Those who attached far-reaching expectations to this hypothesis probably erred; it is certain that the masses of Russians returning home from Europe took with them demands for a different life, a different "culture" into a native life spent at dreary forced labor (the fate of Solzhenitsyn and millions of Russian soldiers returning home showed that Stalin carefully took this danger into account), but the rekindled demands could not dismantle the tough barbed-wire fences of the system.

Maybe, those who believed that these demands were a stimulus were not wrong; it is a different question as to the tempo at which the stimulating force, this cultural demand would progress along the Russian nerve track, scaled to slower reflexes. Long decades and constant intercourse with the West are probably needed for this to take place.

However, all such exchanges of "literary" ideas and other encounters of a similar nature convinced me that Russians who were about forty years of age – hence eight to ten years old before the revolution and still brought up within the protecting, sheltering circle of the family – gave answers wholly different from those of the "Soviet youths," those from twenty to thirty who were educated on the premises of pedagogical training institutions governed by the Marxist-Leninist world view. In fact, the latter differed from the wild and uninhibited *Hitler Jugend* only in their physique. Their literacy level was nil; their truculent manners and sometimes cruel and savage conduct and

ruthless actions proved that the reflexes of the inherited culture were already crushed in their souls. (With the passing of a little time, of a brief human span, a new Russian generation would demand boldly and loudly that it be given knowledge of the world and told the truth by their leaders, but at the end of the Second World War the members of that generation were still in swaddling clothes.) The forty-year-olds had subsisted on the fundamental ideas of the Russian versions of humanistic learning within their families: human solidarity, the written and unwritten laws of "mine and thine." In the forty-year-olds sometimes a sympathetic phenomenon glimmered through the "Bolshevik," the "Red soldier" – the Russian human being.

Toward the end of the second week, when I had tolerable practice in the peculiar rules of dancing and deportment that prescribed how one must consort with the conquerors, two stray Soviet soldiers, disheveled and frightening in appearance, entered our home in the village one morning. I was alone; the women were away scavenging for food and firewood. The two weary, armed and bearded soldiers, worn out by the throes of war and wandering, asked for water; then they sat down beside the mildly heated stove and warmed themselves silently. I sat with them apathetically, waiting for them to leave. One immediately fell asleep. After a time, the other began talking. He spoke to me in Russian or a Ukrainian variant; he didn't look at me, he muttered into his beard. I didn't understand a thing he said, but something in his intonation prompted me to pay attention.

Among the many kinds of works about the Russians – both for and against the Communists – that I read during these years, the echo of a beautiful, passionate, and slightly mythically sounding book by a Baltic author – his name was Schubart – remained in my memory. It was called *Europe and the Eastern Soul*. It was published abroad during the war in a neu-

tral country. I later learned that this Baltic writer, a friend of the Slavs but an anti-Bolshevist, disappeared when the Russians marched into the Baltic states. In his book he drew a curious profile of the Slavs. Schubart said, sometimes bombastically, that "Western man" is still "Promethean," and thus a being oppressed by his experience with land ownership and lust for power, whereas the "Easterner," including the Russian, is a "St. Johnist," believing in redemption. In the years following, I sometimes recollected one of his gloomy and bombastic statements: "Bolshevism is the ultimatum that God delivered to humanity." These are grand words, poetic and prophetic words. Politicians and generals wave their arms on hearing such grandiloquent utterances. But I, who am neither politician nor soldier, discerned that the echo of this declaration remained in my mind. Time and again I wondered during this period, and later as well, how Western man would respond to this ultimatum.

Now, when this wild, hirsute little Russian, with his comrade snoring beside the crested stove, broke into a passionate soliloquy, Schubart's words came to my mind. Is there, in fact, some kind of "role" for the Russians – in the St. Johnist sense – and is skeptical Western man unfit for this role which he doesn't understand, and doesn't even want to hear about? I listened to my visitor. I didn't understand a single word he spoke, yet I somehow really understood what he was saying. As in the Kosztolányi story in which the Bulgarian conductor relates in the corridor of the express train speeding through the night – in Bulgarian, thus a language the traveler doesn't know at all – the great tragedy of his life, and, in the end, the narrator and the listener embrace in brotherly understanding, so did I listen to the loquacious little Russian, and I thought that Wilde was right after all: sometimes Life imitates the vision of Art, the conceptions of writers ...

This little Russian gushing words evoked the memory of still another literary character, the Russian shoemaker in *War and Peace* who explained to Pierre Besukhov, the powerful and wealthy nobleman being held in prison, how simple and, perhaps, not entirely hopeless an undertaking intelligent human life was. My guest was explaining, too: he pounded his chest; he looked at the ceiling, shaking his head; tears streamed down his cheeks; he wiped his tearful eyes with his fist and talked and talked. I listened wordlessly. I understood only that he was very miserable. For this reason, I put my hand on his arm for a moment, and then he looked at me, his eyes swimming in tears. He smiled, sadly, as if asking my pardon; he waved his hand as if ashamed of his own weakness.

Now, the woman I was sharing the place with returned, the interpreter. The declaiming Russian roused his snoring comrade, and they started off in the foggy January afternoon toward the door, the garden, the firing line without saying goodbye. At the door, like someone remembering something, he stopped, turned around and asked what my profession was. When the interpreter answered, this Russian said: "*Kharasho*" – like the first Russian soldier I encountered. I asked him why it is "good" if someone is a writer, what is especially "good" for him in this. He thought for a moment, then replied slowly, articulately.

"It is good because if you are a writer, then you can tell us what we are thinking," he said.

Without looking at me, trudging, he headed off with his comrade. He didn't look back. A literary career doesn't hold many honors in store. But today I still treasure this reply like some special decoration.

During these days the village and its environs got wedged between two battlefronts. Buda had still not fallen; massive Russian forces had laid siege to the capital, but to the west, near Esztergom, the German high command had launched a counter-attack and recaptured the town of the Primate temporarily. Russian infantry and artillery passing through streamed through the village night and day. Casualties were being transported in open trucks to safer locations, and the wounded Russian soldiers, their heads swathed in bandages, lay in the trucks with extraordinary unconcern among mattresses and comforters hastily tied together. The Russian was always a good soldier, especially in wars waged in defense of his homeland, and the Soviet Union's military training programs knew and exploited his courage and reliable disposition. It is not true that they fought "fanatically"; they fought prudently, they looked out for themselves. When wounded, they turned to everyone for help, but in the course of battle — as I observed up close several times — they held on to their positions grimly, bravely, gamely. And when their lives were in peril, they faced the threat with silent unconcern.

One day, drifting ice swept along a group of Russians rowing between the Danube's banks. Their boat began to founder and went under with its seven passengers, Russian soldiers, within the sight of spectators on shore. Some Russians were also among the onlookers. Nothing could be done to help them; the Danube surged violently, sweeping the struggling men among the ice floes. Later, every single witness said that these Russians condemned to death stood motionless in the boat; not one of them shouted or bemoaned his fate. They didn't gesticulate. Wordlessly, with a kind of awful, numb apathy, they awaited death in the icy water.

Russian troops advanced through the village night and day between the two battlefronts. Not a night passed without someone asking for lodgings at our house. In the morning, the ones we occasionally put up repaid us mostly with thievery: they helped themselves to something – a pillow, a pillowcase or comforter, a piece of cutlery – but also clothing – shoes, anything they could get their hands on. They weren't at all choosy, and they never showed any curiosity at all as to whether the person they were robbing was a "bourgeois" or someone down at the heels. It seemed as if they couldn't tell the difference between a "bourgeois" and a "prole."

The three channels through which a large share of Hungarian national property oozed away in these years to the Soviet Union – local pillaging after battles, then reparations and the factories and appropriated industrial enterprises from the "joint" German-Hungarian holdings on the basis of the Potsdam Agreement, these were the three channels – these were not yet organized during these weeks; only the "looting," the industry of pillaging functioned flawlessly. They made off with everything they saw. With my own eyes I saw them strip the villa next door in broad daylight. They loaded the furniture and furnishings on trucks; they even removed the parquet flooring and tore the insulated tubes for electrical wiring out of the walls; they left untouched only the books on the shelves. Before long, the village and residences in the vicinity soon resounded with loud, bitter complaints.

The peasants rescued their valuables in ways as best they could: they buried the wheat, wine and potatoes and hid the cows, pigs and horses in the woods. They blackened girls' faces with soot; they masked, disguised the younger attractive ones as "*staraja babas*," or old women, just as the younger men grew beards out of fear and pretended to be "*starij papas*," or old men, because the rumor was rife that the Russians

were mustering younger men and hauling them away. This rumor was true, except that they carried off not only the young but generally anyone they happened to come across. An acquaintance of mine, a sixty-year-old man, was hurrying across a street in Buda in oxfords and a tuxedo just after the lifting of the siege, when a Russian called him away in a friendly way to do a "little work;" this man, like so many others, woke up in Yekaterinburg and returned years later.

The Russian high command issued an order to assemble a certain number of "unreliable" men in the "liberated" areas. Since Hungarian authority and investigation did not yet exist, Russian administrative bodies simply detained everyone who came their way. In their eyes, all of Hungarian society was "unreliable." Then when they rounded up the *stucks* – this was the Russian technical term – and when the quota of human "pieces" that they imposed on individual provinces was assembled, the Russians began herding their victims toward the nearest reception camp. Meanwhile, many captives escaped in transit, and since the Russian guards were required to deliver the *stucks*, or pieces, by a total number to the reception camp, they simply replaced the missing "dead souls" by picking up anyone approaching them from the opposite direction.

A friend of mine, a dentist of Jewish descent, sent his eighteen-year-old son to fight on the side of the Serbian partisans during that fateful summer. He happened to be captured by the Russians, who shipped him off to a reception camp in Rumania. He repeatedly explained to no avail that he was an "ally;" the Russians listened to him with indifference. His desperate parents ran futilely back and forth between Russian authorities; their son was freed only when he came down with the symptoms of acute tuberculosis, the *galloppierende*, and they then released the boy, agonized by tuberculosis, to his parents, only to have him pass away within a few weeks. At this time, the father hap-

pened to be treating a NKVD officer, and he asked him whether the Russian authorities didn't know that a Jewish boy who was fighting with the Serbian partisans and, as a result, fell into Russian hands could not at this point possibly be anything other than a Russian ally. The NKVD officer, nodding, replied that, yes, the authorities knew this. But, he said, on the occasion of such vast screening operations, one must naturally expect a certain percentage of error. The boy's father asked what the percentage of such an "error" was according to official Russian estimates. Twenty-five, replied the Russian calmly.

Actually, it was greater than that. At this time – and for a long while afterwards – only good luck saved males in Hungarian areas from being hauled off to Russian forced labor camps, where by then several million humans already languished. Large numbers of them were the left-over victims of the Stalin purges that preceded the war; but as a consequence of the postwar weeding out of soldiers and civilians, masses of victims inundated the camps who "had seen the West" and were suspected of carrying home criticism and nostalgia from the front or the prisoner-of-war camps. Later, I spoke with Hungarian prisoners of war who somehow managed to make it back to Hungary from Russian screening and forced labor camps, and their individual accounts reinforced everything contained in reports published in the West years later about the large Russian prisoner-of-war camps (in some places these slave settlements constituted regions of the country). The Communist system of authority feared no one more than those Communists who saw in the West that something else existed, a more effective and more expeditious form of social development than Communism.

During these days, one January morning, an officer-type turned up at our house with two armed privates in "search of someone for work." Not having the

foggiest idea of what he really had in mind, I replied that I would not go and "work" because I am not obligated to do physical labor. I didn't make excuses, I didn't say I was sick, I didn't try to explain. I just said I wasn't willing to perform physical labor. We stood in the middle of the room and stared at each other, the three Russians and I. Maybe this was precisely what spared me; if I had whimpered, tried to hide or asked for sympathy, he probably would have taken me away. So the officer just stared at me — he was a repugnant man with a piercing look and the face of a dogcatcher — he stared at me for a long time. Then they left without a word.

I don't know what happened during those moments. But I learned a few hours later that this patrol had gathered together every able-bodied male in the village and the neighboring houses; the Russians actually put some of them to work building an emergency bridge nearby, but they transported many to a reception camp in Rumania and herded them from there to the Soviet Union. I talked with one of them who returned home after three years; but I also know about some who languished, perhaps still vegetate there if they are still alive. Later, when I learned what happened, I sometimes recollected this extraordinary moment.

The peasants immediately, from the very first, knew the lesson the situation offered. It was as if memories of the time after the Mohács disaster, the one hundred and fifty years of Turkish occupation, were living vividly in their consciousness. The peasant knew there was only one way a man could protect himself against the conqueror from the East: with forests, pit-storage and concealment. The Hungarian people fleeing into a life of despair and anarchy from the pillaging, predatory Turks, the despoilers and kidnapers of women and boys, preserved nerve reflexes from a hundred and fifty years of misery that did not alter

when misfortune began in a new form. Earlier, the Germans robbed differently, institutionally; now, the Russians stole both institutionally and individually. The actual value of their "plundering" cannot be established.

I remember the first piglet that a Russian carried off before my own eyes from the hauler living next door. The owner, his face and lips drained of blood, stared after the Russian carrying the pig. Later, this piglet grew fat. It had a hearty appetite, and when the Russians began feeding it with everything they collected from Finland, Poland, the Baltic states, East Germany, Hungary, Rumania, Bulgaria and Austria's eastern territories, and they poured it all into its trough in the form of "loot," the piglet grew so monstrously fat as no other pig ever before in history. Only the naive could believe that the Russians would be willing to relinquish the opportunity for this battenning in exchange for some several billions in American loans. For years and years on barges, trucks and trains, they hauled away from these rich lands the wheat, iron, coal, oil, lard, and also human resources, German technicians and Baltic workers. The piglet the Russian officer carried off at this time before my very eyes grew wonderously round in those years. It all began with "loot" from the village pigsties and caves; then it was continued in the brilliantly lighted ministerial halls of the captive nations, when in the presence of photographers the emissaries of Soviet commerce signed the compacts of "reparation" and "trade" they had transacted with the captive nations. There are few examples in modern times resembling this institutionalized and entrenched extortion.

The people defended themselves as best they could. The system's pillaging detachments scoured the country unmercifully; there was no other escape from them than hiding and hoarding. Later, those who, like lion tamers, had the capacity to mold others through

psychic impact rebuked Hungarian society for not having a "guilty conscience" about its past regimes, the inhumanity of the Nazis and their Hungarian accomplices, the cruelty and pillaging committed in the Ukrainian and Russian villages. In truth, this "guilty conscience" flickered only wanly in Hungarian souls because a people is never inclined to have a guilty conscience; this can only be the test of an individual. But if there was some kind of guilty conscience because of the past in Hungarian society, the Russians' attitude and behavior extinguished its last faint glimmer.

The Russians didn't care how the inhabitants received them; their system was concerned only with tangible results, thus with the pig, oil, iron, coal and the "human material" that they laid their hands on. This lack of inhibitions – later, this was also the typical Russian behavior in world politics – was one of their great weapons and strengths. In democratic countries, leaders are always compelled to treat public opinion carefully. The Russian totalitarian system wasn't even concerned about its own people's opinion, so why should it care about the feelings of subjugated peoples? When I first saw a Russian take a piglet away from a poor Hungarian peasant – and then later, when everyone saw this piglet grow fat on the assets of peoples held hostage – I had to wonder whether this eventuality had ever occurred to Western statesmen at Yalta and other meetings. The pig the Russians carried off grew fabulously fat. And its appetite did not slacken.

The peasants took the cows into the woods, buried the potatoes in pits, hid the women, just as in the time of the Turks. In addition, they soon sensed that most Russians were not only rapacious and plundering marauders, but also corrupt, so they began to deal with them on the side. The Russians took the horse away, but next day a new caravan arrived. Moscovites thirsting for brandy were driving thousands of stolen

horses, but for a liter of brandy – this was its price – the peasants bought themselves another horse. After a year, persons were riding horse-drawn wagons who could never before afford such a vehicle. The stolen piglet caused much pain – many persons would sooner give up their ideals than their piglets – but as soon as the military situation permitted, the women in the vicinity left on foot for distant counties and carried home a squealing young pig on their backs. During these days, I saw such remarkable instances of persistence and historical dexterity in handling problems that I can never forget them.

At first, when the Russians were plundering them, people, gnashing their teeth, admitted that all this was bitter, sometimes tragic for them, but, well, “woe to the vanquished.” We have to survive, we kept saying. One day the Russians will go away, we will pay reparations, and we will commence something new, if possible something better, more humane ... However, when the people realized that this foreign power was seizing not only material goods but human rights as well, something incredible took place: a people went to the edge of suicide’s precipice, to revolution, and attacked tanks and submachine guns with bare fists, because they saw that the Russians wanted to destroy their humaneness, their spirit, their character, their individuality. In 1945, in the foggy weeks of January, no one was thinking about this. Not even the Russians.

9

Serbs lived in a small town near our place, and some of its inhabitants followed the Greek Orthodox faith. It was a charming old town, and during these weeks I occasionally strolled over to its popular bakery for bread. It was interesting to see how the Greek Orthodox priests responded to the Russians.

This religious denomination was among the established, legally recognized denominations in Hungary. Now, after the arrival of the Russians, the bearded priests came and went contentedly in the town, speaking Serbian with showy loudness and fraternizing with them. The racial kinship, the awareness of the Moscow archbishop's existence and the mighty proximity of the "Eastern Church" roused self-importance in the local priests. These priests were not Communists, of course, and daily contact with the Russians quickly soured them about walking with chests thrust out under the cover of their Slavic brothers' arrival; but they were Slavic priests, priests of the Eastern Church, and they now felt the moment had arrived when the Greek Orthodox Church, in such a malformed version, would with Communist approval again be powerful within the meridians of Christianity.

These visits to the Serbian town, whose inhabitants and priests disclosed their Slav consciousness during the early weeks after the Russians arrived, called to mind, faintly but perceptibly, a crucial moment in Hungary's history. What glimmered briefly in my mind was the question of what would have happened if Hungary, at the time when it renounced paganism and embraced Christianity, had opted not for the Western Roman church but for the Byzantine church instead ... About 900 A. D., when the Hungarians converted to the Christian faith, Byzantium was the magnetic, mighty European power. At that time, the Árpáds maintained political, diplomatic and, indeed, family ties with Byzantium. Béla, who severed Dalmatia from the Eastern Empire after the collapse of the Comnenian family, made peace with Emperor Isaac Angelus. After the death of Stephen III, imbued with Byzantine culture, Béla returned to Hungary from Byzantium to become king. Irene, the wife of Emperor Johannes, was Saint Ladislav's daughter. The

list could go on ... The dynastic and political connections and cultural ties were strong. Still, at the decisive moment when Hungarian statesmen had to seek a place in Europe, they set their compass on the West, though Rome at the time was only a shadow power.

The Russians of the Kiev Grand Duchy, the Bulgarians who then ranked as a major power, and most of the peoples in the Danubian region sought the protection of mighty Byzantium and Eastern Christianity. Hungarians accepted an ideological, intellectual and political alliance with the West. And while I waited at the bakery for the slack-baked and covertly dispensed bread, freshly baked with corn flour, bran and barley groats, and gazed through the bakery's glass door at the bearded, purple-sashed local Greek Orthodox priests strolling the streets of the little town with ostentatious smugness and amiable but supercilious smiles in the company of Russian officers, I couldn't help but think that this Slav, this "feminine power" could affect Hungarians fatefully. A people, in awful isolation, companionless among the peoples of the world, already could have vanished in the Slavic melting pot, if a thousand years ago the nation's founder, King Stephen, had requested missionary priests and coronation emblems not from Pope Sylvester II but from that Byzantium which Slavic characteristics had permeated by then. At such a crucial time, when peoples and their highly competent leaders must decide the future with its every consequence for the body politic – and this is what the moment was like for Hungarians a thousand years ago when the choice had to be made between Western and Eastern Christendom – they act not only with their intellectual faculties but also with their instincts.

At the time, all rational reasoning steered Hungarians toward the Byzantine church. And still, the Holy Crown, which played such an extraordinary role in the turbulent history of the Hungarian people for a

thousand years and was rarefied from a talismanic object of piety into a constitutional concept, arrived in Hungary from Rome.

I can't say I considered all this composed as a musical score while I waited for the slack-baked bread in the small-town bakery and gazed, meanwhile, through the glass door at Serbian priests fraternizing with Russian soldiers. But a person doesn't think just with his brains in danger zones, and now all born as Hungarians were in danger, because the Slavs had arrived, they were here. Up to this point, they were more like myths, historical shadow clouds, somewhere far away. Now they had arrived in a country inhabited by a people whose language they didn't understand, who followed a different religion, pursued a different way of life, were "different" in every respect – not Slavic but Hungarian. And there was something frightening in this – frightening for a reason other than the fact that the victorious enemy, the Communists, had come to the defeated country. What was frightening was the fact that the Slav had arrived. But who was he, actually? And what did he want in a country that wasn't "Slavic," but lived in the belief that it was "Western" and "Christian"? When we finally came face to face with the Slavs, we all thought of this, not with ideas composed in a learned manner, but with our skin, our nerves.

The Serbian priests quickly realized that they could expect nothing from their Slavic brethren, the Communist Russians. At this time, the Russian high command strictly forbade the occupying troops from mistreating priests – priests of any denomination! – or from causing any harm whatsoever to church dignitaries. In the cities, the commanders made ceremonial calls on bishops and archbishops. But the Russian looter spared no one, and after a short while, the Serbian priests also became acquainted with night visi-

tors who spoke Russian but did not respect the Slav kinship.

However, during the first days after the Russian forces marched in, the Russian officers and Serbian priests fraternized. In the little town a poster in the nation's colors still clung to the door of an abandoned blacksmith shop – directly opposite the bakery – which declared in large letters that a “Christian national business” awaited the buyer and customer there. The shop's owner, a notorious Arrow-Cross member, fled to the West before the Russians arrived. Then the locals and Russians hastily ransacked the place, but they left the “Christian national” sign on the front door. One morning, while I was waiting in the bakery, I watched through the glass door as with animated movements of his hands a Serbian priest showed the poster to an officer wearing a leather coat, translating and explaining the meaning of the text volubly.

The frightful, malformed and ghastly nature of the recent historical past flashed for a moment on the wall poster. Those who drafted and printed the text – and those who posted it – began by carrying off “Jewish property.” They continued by hauling away and slaughtering hundreds of thousands of innocent, unfortunate human beings of Jewish descent. Now the Russians arrived, and they continued the looting, the hauling away and murdering. The Russian officer looked sternly at the ragged poster. He didn't say anything; he swished his whip and moved on, with the little voluble priest at his side.

What did this Communist soldier think of that “Christianity” out of which a “Christian regime” was formed in recent decades? What did he think of this “nation” whose concept was used to advertise a business? What did he think of that “Western” culture which dispatched hundreds of thousands of rightful Hungarian citizens to flaying camps in jam-packed freight cars and slaughtered them? And what did he

think of the flaying-houses in his country where judgment was passed on classes: on millions of human beings who were just as innocent as the others, the Westerners, the millions who were sentenced to death because of their lineage? I don't know what he thought. And it is not likely he had a "guilty conscience." He simply swished his whip and moved on. Oddly, the poster remained stuck to the door of the Arrow-Cross blacksmith's shop for some time; it never occurred to anyone to scrape it off. Finally, the spring wind carried the paper scraps away.

In the village there now began, as if on signal, the looting of the "abandoned possessions." First to be ransacked were the homes of the "savage fascists," that is, the bourgeois owners who had moved to the capital or on to the West. These ventures were always carried out under the cover of night; sometimes the Russians stole on their own, sometimes the local pirates joined them. Since practice makes perfect – and according to another saying, the more you eat the more you want – the village's ne'er-do-wells quickly noticed that many things occurring in the dark of night could be put to the Russians' account. This sportive diversion commenced on March 18, 1944 – the memorable name day – and it didn't stop even after the Russian armies had moved on and Hungarian authorities resumed their duties. The powers-that-be issued the order to collect the "fascist books" in the homes of the "guilty," and the "democratic police," who executed the edict zealously, discovered, simultaneously with the fascist books in the homes of the guilty individuals, that there were also fascist silver candlesticks and fascist china. Of course, they absconded with these "exhibits of guilt" as well.

For two weeks this motley assortment of humans lined up at the doors of the houses in the village day and night; cannons roared, Russians with their Rata fighter planes launched attacks every hour on the residential sections of the besieged capital; large trucks loaded with Stalin pipe organs rumbled between the two battle sectors, between Buda and the western bend of the Danube. We were living, it seemed to us, in the immediate reality of the war and already knew to some extent what the Russians and Red Army were like. Actually, we hadn't seen anything yet. Everything we saw and experienced up to this point was only a congenial social call.

The war in all its dreadful reality swept down on the village unexpectedly. During these weeks, a certain wary way of life developed in the village houses stretching along both sides of the several kilometer-long road. We all lived behind locked doors, we buried our valuables, we tried to make our Russian visitors, the straggling military detachments in transit tractable with food and polite words. Now, from one hour to the next, billeting struck the life of our village like hail.

The battlefield came to a halt before the trenches of nearby Buda, and the vast Russian forces prepared for the final, decisive assault on the beleaguered capital. On a January afternoon, our village, which they had merely passed through earlier, became a key command post, one of the operational bases for the nearby firing line. In practice, this meant that every house filled up with Russians. At the orders of the high command, a bridge had to be thrown across the Danube between the island directly opposite and our village. They ordered us to dig places with pickaxes in the macadamized highway for the mines they wanted to plant there in case they had to retreat later.

Russians swarmed in every room. Like an arctic ice storm, they unexpectedly smote the village, which had till then known a relatively peaceful life.

During the next three weeks, all of us living in the village came to know the real structure of the Red Army. In 1939, when the powerful military forces of the Soviet Union attacked little Finland and the assault advanced only slowly, many held that the Russian high command had "concealed" its power in the Finnish war to mislead the Germans. Nobody knows whether this was so or not. But we now saw the Red Army in its true character, in its full-fledged might. During these weeks, the Russian high command didn't conduct "concealed" military operations on Hungary's soil; instead, it spared neither time nor effort in the struggle. Russian forces fought with all their might and main and with every weapon at its disposal.

The magnitude of their military might cannot be measured; ever newer companies and whole army corps arrived from invisible sources with all the requisites and equipment they needed. The might they displayed was fierce, imposing, frightening. Especially surprising were the merciless energy and passion with which they seized everything they needed and the way they carried out orders; they always bore down relentlessly and ruthlessly on the line of least resistance. They were just as ruthless to each other. Naturally, they didn't spare citizens either. In a few hours, the appearance and life of the village were debased beyond recognition.

One afternoon, we were sitting in January's murkiness, without lights, in the darkened room, when all of a sudden we were startled by the sound of axe blows whacking at the gate post. When I went outside I saw a large number of trucks in the yard. By then the soldiers had already toppled the lower gate together with its stone posts and fence, trucks loaded with barrels of gasoline and machine tools swarmed

over the yard, and several Russians, wielding their axes, were in the process of taking apart the posts and fence of the upper gate with earnest expertise. Within moments the path to the house was clear. A motor vehicle, a story high and shaped like a box car — it was the conveyance for the electric generator — rolled up to the front door, and they began to install cables. Some kind of officer came into the house, looked at the rooms and the women sharing the place with us, and ordered everyone then living in the house to withdraw into one of the small side rooms. Then the officer engaged all the remaining rooms and premises to serve as the *mashtierskaia*, as one of the repair shops for the military forces passing through the village. By evening the house looked like a factory. The Russians set up the welding shop in the bathroom; the work bench, the workshop of the repairmen lighted by a gasoline lamp was established in the pantry. They promptly herded the women of the village into the kitchen and also ordered my wife and our housemate to look to the peeling of the potatoes. They started the electric generator and set about repairing the vehicles, tanks, and Rata fighter planes lined up in the yard. We locals stumbled about ignorantly in the noisy repair shop. There were three rooms on the first floor, one on the second, and they all filled up with Kirghizians, Uzbeks, Russians, Ukrainians, Mongolians and Siberians. Every imaginable human breed cropped up among our guests.

They took over the village just as swiftly and relentlessly. They never bothered to unlock gates anywhere, they simply chopped down the posts with axes and entered the house fully armed and on horseback. One time, my guests needed a small piece of board at night, so they promptly sawed up a bed upstairs, put the board to use, and threw the rest of the bed on the trash pile. They sawed down, in a few hours, every telegraph pole in the village, every full-grown tree needed to string electric cable. They always set their sights on

the essential, the immediate. They arrived in the afternoon, and by evening they filled up every house, every room in the village, as if the dust cloud of an Eastern storm had enveloped our lives.

In those first days, we walked gasping, groping in the dark among them. About thirty repairmen and drivers moved into our house; toward midnight they were already asleep beside each other on the floor in the middle and side rooms, like lizards on the frozen paths of a garden. They began work at dawn, at five o'clock. They were kept unmercifully busy. The mechanics toiled from five in the morning till eleven at night, unflaggingly overhauling the broken-down war engines under the supervision of their slave drivers. A mechanical engineer who lived in the village was, like the blacksmith, the carpenter and the locksmith, also pressed into service. These craftsmen confirmed that the Russian mechanics were hardworking but lacked technical flair. Somehow, tools fit their hands differently from the Western workers', and this could have been true then, a generation ago. But afterwards, time delivered the extraordinary gift of the modern technical reflex to the Soviet worker.

It is certain that everything I saw during the following weeks, which were troubled, not without dangers, hectic and yet uncommonly edifying – we in the village observed in those days up close the infrastructure and regulations in the deployment of the mammoth Eastern army – convinced me, like all laymen, that the Red Army was an exceptionally potent military force. It was sustained by almost inexhaustible reserves; but at war's end, these reserves were not so much a technical as a first-rate human resource. The German army was an organizational and technical military power; this Eastern army, on the other hand, gave the impression of some instinctive biological power – human variants of ants or termites – that had assumed a military shape. It seemed as if ter-

mites were waging war incalculably with the mysterious capacities of organic matter. They brought cannons, guns and ammunition with them from the Soviet Union; the Rata fighter planes, primitive but effective in city battles, were manufactured in Russia – but otherwise all their tools, trucks and tanks came from America and were produced on the other side of the ocean for them. This army of termites has become mechanized in recent decades: Russian industry built the atom bomb, a navy, ballistic missiles and new airplanes. But at what a price and whose help: domestic and kidnapped scientists, spies, at the sacrifice of the forced labor of an entire Russian generation? This is another question. But every invention of the technical revolution added to the well-equipped and mechanized Soviet army. What is the quality of this mechanized Red army? This is also a question. They lost out on the flight to the moon, and it is possible that the technical contrivances displayed in the window are, in reality, not as flawless as Western equipment. The Hitlerites' big mistake was to underestimate Russian and Soviet power on the basis of false information. It is possible that precisely the same kind of mistake will occur in the future, when – probably again on the basis of false information – Soviet power will be overestimated.

But back then, in the winter of 1944–45, the Soviet army's technical matériel did not amount to much without America's help. The abundance of humans made up for what was lacking in technology. The way the soldiers pounced on a village, a house, a family, the way they destroyed everything they needed or didn't need – this was the manifestation of some blind, instinctive biological power. I watched their deployments from the end of our yard, from a hillside, from a distance of one and a half kilometers; I watched their massive and bloody struggles on the opposite bank of the Danube. One time, I saw them launch Rata fighter planes from the plow in front of our yard. I saw their

weapons. Now, when I think back, I, who am not a military expert, can only say that the infantry was outstanding – brave, dogged, disciplined in combat and on duty, laggard, shiftless, unruly when off duty – but it was, in its totality, a well-organized military force. Military experts I spoke to at the time said that Russian artillery was just as outstanding, and those who weren't military experts also noted how resourceful and resolute their high command and strategy were. Otherwise, back then, their technical readiness was mediocre, even inferior.

But as in their personal relations, so in their strategy and political and diplomatic warfare – then and later – that strange, cunning and adolescent playfulness appeared itself in the way they constantly tried to take their adversary by surprise. The Russians knew how to take the measure of their opponents and outwit them. They could laugh in their faces. As their war machine overran the little village that night, as they sawed the beds apart, chopped down the gates and door posts and telegraph poles and dragged away every able-bodied male to build an emergency bridge on the Danube in three days with a senseless waste of materials – the village sacrificed much for this bridge which, as it soon became apparent, was not needed, the Russians didn't use it even once because they failed to take the drift ice into account, and a week later the ice carried away the whole structure! – so did they overrun the propertied society of Hungary with an outrage called “land reform,” perpetrated in a single night, and so did they “nationalize” all Hungarian industry, banks and wholesale trades in a single night-maneuver. They prepared, too, to destroy with one fell swoop the authority of the Church over the soul, and then to crash through the barricades of education and intellect. This uninhibited and ferocious will was always the reason for the success of all their manifestations, and this will did not recognize either

moral or spiritual restraints. It recognized only goals and results.

In their pursuit of these, they worked the villagers ruthlessly. But their own men, too. Within a few days the village became a clattering workshop, somewhere between a factory, a caravansary-like lodging house, and a large office. This was how we lived among our guests, the thirty, sometimes even greater numbers of Kirghiz, Chuwash, Uzbek and Russian mechanics and soldiers. Of course, after the first chaotic days – as in all places where people lived with the Russians in such a setting – a more intimate human situation evolved. Human faces emerged from the chaos.

The *mashtierskaia* was manned by a trained military detachment; since Stalingrad, troops of mechanics advanced in the wake of the army driving the Germans back; they always worked directly behind the firing lines at great risk because artillerymen and truck and tank drivers took the repaired weapons and motor parts right out of their hands to the firing lines. Here I also experienced what I later detected in the political life imposed by the Communists, namely that there are no laurels and acquired merits in the Soviet system. Like the Soviet worker, the Soviet politician knows that it didn't matter how reliable and distinguished a revolutionary he was at the beginning of the revolution, at the time of the barricades, or what merits he obtained when Soviet industry had to be rebuilt; it didn't matter if someone was an "ace worker" twenty years before. What always counted in the Soviet system was whether it could use a human being, the raw material, today, Thursday, at 4:30 p. m.

If it could, it used him; if he grew tired or became disabled, or he could no longer be trusted, the system tossed him aside mercilessly. I was living with Russians in close proximity for the first time, and I would have liked to form an understanding of the kind of school these men attended, their thoughts about

things, and their relations with themselves and the world. These men had already lived through the Soviet periods of great "re-education" and "purges," the extermination campaigns conducted against the Narodniks, the rich peasantry, the Mensheviks, the Socialists and the Trotskyites, and the show trials. They knew that anyone the Soviet cannot or does not want to use disappears in the casements of forced-labor camps to the East. They were acquainted with a system one can't possibly bargain with. And later, when the Communists of Hungarian birth, who were expertly trained in the Soviet Union and were returned from Moscow, assumed power in Hungary under the protection of the Red Army's bayonets, signs of this intimidation could be sensed in them, despite all their bombastic self-confidence: they also knew — much more than did my *mashtierskaia* workers — what the Kremlin thought of them. They knew, and they were afraid. I lived among the products of this system during these weeks, and it did not require a particularly powerful imagination to envision what awaited us in Hungary, what awaited Europe and the world if this system should some day expand its authority.

11

I would have liked to make out the kind of supervision under which these men carried out their duties. In that confused, raw and dangerous situation, I adhered to my resolve to observe the Soviet system without prejudice and preconception. Of course, the standard system of military hierarchy and subordination was visible and perceptible: the repair unit had its chief, a non-commissioned officer who lived with his men; but while they slept on the bare floor, he bedded down away from them on the only remaining bed, next to the wall. He roused the company at five in the morn-

ing, distributed the mail and supervised their work in the daytime. His name was Sedlachek; he hated Hungarians – he said his mother was Hungarian – and he was an unusually bullying, brutal, stupid man. This Sedlachek carried a chiming clock the size of a child on his war travels – only heaven knows where he got hold of it along the way – and he hung on to it jealously. The clock stood under his nose on a book shelf next to his bed, and he wound it carefully every morning and proudly listened to it chime. Of course, the clock showed Moscow time, which differed from ours by two hours, and it was this different, Russian time that it struck.

Along with this Russian reckoning of time, they also brought Cyrillic letters and all that “difference,” that mysterious strangeness which Western man never understands and which even this compulsory and very intimate living together could not dispel. We lived for weeks with the thirty men like animals in a cage; we ate from the same bucket, slept on the same straw, did their laundry, cooked their meals and helped them with their work; but not for a single instant did I feel there was something common between us. Circumstances that bring human beings closer to each other really were not lacking: war, misery and mutual privation impelled everyone, both victors and vanquished, toward interdependence. Nor can I say that these men – and the others who continually wandered in and out of our house during the weeks of the siege – were one and all particularly malevolent and inhumane creatures. Villains with natures baser than an animal’s turned up among them, of course, but I encountered kind ones as well; sometimes I detected compassion in their eyes and words. But no degree of shared living conditions could ever dispel the strangeness.

When I came to know the men a little better – their tastes, longings, the way they, growling like

dogs, jealously guarded from each other and ourselves that measly, sorry little quarry that they still possessed, the loot stuffed into their bags, the personal belongings, a toy they wanted to take home to a child, a broken thermometer, everything that was an "object," everything that could be held — after exposure to these, I gradually came to understand that the innermost, the real reason for their widespread and endless looting was not rage directed against the "fascist" enemy but simply abject poverty. These Communist Russians were so impoverished, so miserably destitute, so hard up in war and peace, in their civilian lives, and the revolution and the Communist tyranny that followed had so completely stripped them of everything needed to make life more colorful, more humane that now, when they were set loose in the world after thirty years of privation and drudgery, they threw themselves hungrily on everything that fell into their hands. During the last two decades, the very same motivating forces were, in general, observable behind the Bolsheviks' strategy in world politics: the fear that they would be able to neutralize internal discontent only with compulsory solutions, and the destitution, the indigence that sometimes forced them into concessions, then into ever viler and brazen looting. Western highbrows who described the Communists' cynical, greedy and cruel strategy as "transitional errors" most often awoke from their utopian dreams only when the Communist system grabbed them by the throat personally. (Sometimes not even then.) As the men in the *mashtierskaia* flung themselves on shoes, clothing, toys and liquor, so the Soviet Union cast itself on the possessions of the defeated nations, and so will it hurl itself some day on the impoverished of the Far East to squeeze out something for itself from there, too, the forced labor adapted to drudgery, if nothing else, and so will it throw itself some day on Western Europe, if it will have the opportunity to do so, and the "liberal,"

“bridge-building” and “coexisting” Western intelligentia will have paved the way for the undertaking. I increasingly believe that the “class war” is not the real reason behind this struggle; it is the abject poverty and indigence pervading the East, and then, too, the mutual interests of the Djilas and the “celebrated” New Class.

I lived among the men during those weeks, observing them and trying to fathom the human and military structure of the Soviet detachment. Sedlachek's immediate superiors were the engineering officers of the bridge-building squad; they came to our place day and night to monitor the work; they squabbled and gave advice; apparently they were better educated. They lived separately in the villas; they ate separately and had orderlies who took care of them. But the worker-soldiers didn't pay much attention to them; they talked back to them, apparently not acknowledging them as real, almighty superiors. They behaved otherwise when the field officer arrived on a tour of inspection. On those occasions, they chased us, the locals, out into the yard, the workers mustered in a symmetrical semi-circle in the large room, and Sedlachek saluted stiffly and made his report. The high-ranked officer, wearing a leather coat and dressed in Western style, his shoulders adorned with gold epaulettes, and white-gloved, listened to the report and conducted an inspection. From the standpoint of the order of rank, this system of higher military command and attitude toward authority conformed with a similar hierarchy found in Western armies.

But the field officer departed and Sedlachek stayed, and I slowly learned that the real power, the chief authority did not rest in the hands of field officers. I never found out who the “political officer” was among the men, and I knew even less who kept an eye on the political officer. I could only sense that dangerous potentates constantly moved among us. Some-

times a GEPU officer, fur-capped and elegantly attired, showed up; he was a young man with a handsome face, smelled faintly of cologne, and had soft white hands; he was a kind of dashing, spoiled dandy, like the Lenskys and Onegin in the great Russian poem. Before the war, he taught "health exercises" and "calisthenics" in Moscow. Our Kirghizians trembled in his presence. He was the head of the local military police, the secret police accompanying the troop, and thus the master over life and death. When he entered the room or one of the workshops, the cursing, yelling, lustily singing men fell silent; not one of them looked at him; they set to work with downcast eyes and bowed heads ...

One night, an enterprising youth ferreted out the Lucky Strike tin box in which we kept our remaining money; we discovered the theft at the very hour that the perfumed GEPU officer arrived for a visit. He noticed our pained countenances and asked us what was wrong. He was a bit astonished by the answer; he stared at us uncomprehendingly, like someone who couldn't understand what was so extraordinary about the fact that his men, the Russian soldiers, stole everything they laid their hands on. But then he shrugged his shoulders and offered to conduct a fierce "interrogation" of the soldiers, guaranteeing that the perpetrator – if not the money – would be found within a few hours. I talked him out of it; I just didn't want to make any personal enemies among the men. He said arrogantly that he didn't understand such fastidiousness, and he departed regretfully, like someone who would have gladly presented his own masterly performance of an Eastern interrogation to us, the bungling Westerners. When he left the room everyone relaxed, the thief, too, who presumably lurked in fright there in the house, and we, too, the aggrieved. However, I later saw the Lucky Strike box in the hands of the local village notary, who, earlier an Arrow Cross, now danced

attendance on the Russians with bustling eagerness; one of the Russians living under our roof gave it to him as a gift in payment for amorous services, the procurement of women.

A fine-featured little fellow from the East cleaned and cooked for the detachment of mechanics with the efficient and easy hand movements of a simian; he swept and washed up after them. His name was Hassan, an Uzbek. He was from Tashkent, and slant-eyed and yellow-skinned; he shivered in the cold, kept silent, and didn't like the Russians, who looked down at him and spoke to him scornfully. "You're not a Russian," a good-natured, chubby teenager, Fyedor, the mess attendant, sometimes teased him, saying, "You're a Chink." At such times, Hassan growled like a dog when it is being provoked. The Russians emphasized in other ways that they were the superior race.

There was a Jew among the mechanics, a certain Andrey, a young man who was born and raised in the Soviet Union; he was at home in the Jewish republic there and kept to himself ostentatiously. He bedded down separately in the kitchen and ate alone; in the morning he donned the trappings required for Jewish prayers, turned toward the wall, and prayed for a long time in that position.

There was a Siberian, some kind of aristocrat, a gray-eyed, platinum blond, haughty and lonely man who looked down on everyone, including the White Russians and Ukrainians. Accustomed to the splendid world of nature and raised in the ancient craft of fishing and hunting, he lived among the unkempt mechanics with a grand and nonchalant arrogance, and the men respected his physical excellence and acknowledged that he was better than the others. This Siberian associated with Hassan, the Uzbek, like a hunter with his dog; sometimes he whistled to him and the little Asian, who otherwise avoided his companions, hurried to him and served him dutifully. When Has-

san heard we had been robbed, he rushed up to the attic, looked around, and, after a time, crept down the stairs with the crestfallen look of a cheated child: he indicated with rueful hand movements that the thief had taken everything and no loot was left behind for him. I made friends with this Uzbek. He told many stories about Tashkent, where it is always warm, the lights are always on, scalding hot water bubbles up from the earth, and the natives stroll about in colorful caftans. When I stated that we also had lived like that not long ago at home, in nearby Budapest – except we didn't wear caftans – he listened with blinking suspicion. Apparently, he didn't believe me; in this Uzbek as in many of his comrades, Russian and Chuwash, glimmered that *complex de superiorité* Gide detected during his visit to Russia. He was a well-mannered, strange little man from the East and also clean in his own way. I once saw him do up the dishes in the kitchen and then wash his hair in the dishwater.

12

At noon there was a one-hour break for lunch; Hassan brought the food from the nearby camp kitchen in a bucket. The mechanics sat down around the sole remaining table or settled down on boxes and started to eat. I looked at this strange, only half-human picture for many days and tried to distinguish what was a necessity, a hardship of war and then what was "Russian" in this scene: the dreariness of Russian life, the indifferent slovenliness of the Russian man. There must have been some sign of consternation in the look with which I viewed the scene, for one of the mechanics, a Ukrainian, an older man, a foreman, already past forty, winked at me, and when he passed by me, he whispered amusingly:

"Russki Ivan!"

He waved his hand like one who knows more but isn't allowed to express it. Later I found out that "Russki Ivan" meant something like our "Jóska Sobri," or "Robin Hood": that is what popular speech calls the folk highwayman. The Ukrainian foreman of the machine shop ate alone in a corner; he was always polite; he brought us soap and almost humbly asked us to launder his underwear; he stole kerosene, sugar and bread for us. He once said:

"You still don't know the Russians!"

He looked around, putting his finger to his lips. Till then, I hadn't encountered a Soviet man who complained about conditions at home. When I much later read a prophecy that cautioned the world about the Russians, the Ukrainian's warning came to my mind. (The prophecy went like this: "When Russia builds upon the cowardice and fears of the Western powers, it rattles its saber and, to the extent possible, lists its demands, so that it can later act as if it were magnanimous, when it is content with achieving its most immediate aims. Is the danger past? No, only the blindness of the European ruling classes has reached its zenith. To begin with, Russian politics is immutable ... The methods, tactics, maneuvers may change, but the polar star of its politics, world rule, is a fixed star.") The author of the quoted lines is Karl Marx. My Ukrainian visitor didn't know Marx's writings, but he did know the Russians.

Hassan was more talkative than the Ukrainian. In the evening hours, when he no longer had any work to do, I sometimes played chess with him. We sat at the dirty table in the flickering light of the oil lamp; motors and bombs rumbled outside, and the man from the East leaned over the chessboard with solemn intentness. At such times, we also conversed, if the interpreter was nearby. Hassan expressed an interest in the origin of the Hungarians, but before I could reply,

a voice unexpectedly spoke above our heads. This is what it said, calmly, with infinite scorn:

"The Hungarians have now demonstrated at Voronezh that they are of Asiatic descent."

I looked up and recognized him: the gangly, reddish-blond-haired master bridge-builder from Moscow was standing behind me with his pipe in his mouth, wearing a well-tailored short leather jacket and watching the game. This man had stood out earlier, for he always walked alone and never spoke to anyone; he somehow managed to remain alone and aloof even at common meals. In the morning and afternoon he went out to the bridge construction site, issued orders; then he returned to the house, took out a newspaper or a book and read. Sometimes he wrote page upon page in a notebook in Cyrillic letters. I was pleased when he spoke up because up to now he had not shown the slightest inclination to converse; he lived among us like one who did not deem the members of the bourgeois household worthy of so much as a glance. I could only conclude that he held a distinctive rank in the detachment, because it wasn't only the foot-soldiers but also the officers who turned to him with questions, and even the perfumed GEPU officer addressed him with respect. He always answered calmly and thoughtfully, put his glasses on his nose — he was the only Russian in the company who wore glasses, but even later I very rarely saw a bespectacled Russian — and issued orders with unmistakable superiority.

This man wore no insignia; he was only a private but in reality the sole authority in the company. Even the political officer feared him. I later learned that he was a member of the Party, and this conferred some kind of high rank; he was an old Communist, perhaps the only true and faithful Communist I met among the Russians. He had survived the massive purges, and he hated the Hungarians, Germans, and capitalists. Now he finally spoke up. He sat down

beside the table; with his pipe in his mouth, he patiently waited for us to finish and then offered to play a game. After that evening, we played chess and conversed every day or night for a week.

On the first evening, I told him that in a war every man turns into a beast, that certain Hungarian soldiers behaved unjustly or quite savagely at Voronezh, but that he should not pass judgment on Hungarians, because, as a people, they are victims of terrible misfortunes. He heard me out patiently; then, reflecting, he replied slowly and thoughtfully:

"Yes," he said, "you are not free. You will not be free now either," he said, raising his index finger; later, I recalled these words: "because we Russians can only liberate ourselves. Only the Hungarians, Bulgarians, and Rumanians can liberate themselves as well."

He said he is a Communist and hates the bourgeois. I asked him if I am a bourgeois.

"No, you're not a bourgeois," he said, "because you don't live on wealth or the labor of others but on your own labor. But you are still a bourgeois" — and he looked at me askance from behind the pipe smoke — "because you are bourgeois in your soul. You hang on to something that no longer exists."

He made a sign indicating he was unwilling to go into the matter in greater detail. I asked him what happened to the bourgeoisie in Russia. "The revolution finished them off," he said gravely; "the revolution killed a third of them, a third emigrated and scattered, a third were slowly absorbed by the Soviet system and found their place there."

I looked at this extraordinary, sensibly-speaking man, and I suspected he also descended from the middle class. On one occasion, he said that it must be difficult to be a writer in the revolution, but no one can be considered to be a true writer who does not understand that revolution is so gigantic an undertaking

that it has the right to sacrifice that relative something called freedom. "Why is intellectual freedom relative?" I asked him. "Because intellectual freedom is not possible without social and material freedom," he replied.

It was hard to engage in an argument under the conditions in which we lived, so I didn't reply. Even when, as earlier and later, when I came up against bigoted, hidebound Communists and their fellow travelers, I noticed that this type of individual is unwilling to permit the arguments of their fellow disputants to cross the threshold of consciousness; he fears that everything within and around him that he stacked together so carefully and tenaciously with his hands might collapse. I could not tell the bridge-builder from Moscow that culture is always mightier than despots and despotism, and that the intellectually creative individual is in his own sphere of activity absolutely independent of the tyranny of current snipers, whether political, ideological or commercial in nature, and continues to create his work in the catacomb and in prison. The bridge-builder from Moscow would not have understood this anyway, even as the parasitical fellow-traveling dilettantes don't believe it either. This was why I didn't answer, just asked, and I could tell he was happy he was able to reply.

I said, between two chess moves, that I have tried to look at the Russians and the Soviet system objectively, that certainly much about the Soviets has been distorted in past decades, and for this reason I was glad to learn what he believed to be the truth. I asked him what the Soviet tax system is like. He explained at length that about twelve percent is deducted from a Soviet worker's wages and an additional two percent for health insurance; the rest is his, and he can put it in a bank and receive three percent interest on his deposit. I asked how a Soviet citizen gets hold of the "rest." Are the standards, the actual wages

high enough, how many hours a person in the Soviet must work before he earns, beyond daily necessities, what he needs for clothing, books, travel, thus the "rest"? This question made him uneasy and he changed the subject. He said the present situation is abnormal. The war is on, ration cards are required for everything, and the peasants have accumulated a lot of surplus money; but once the war is over, a surplus will again develop for the workers.

He related that there are priests in the Soviet Union, they are paid by the state, and "those who want to go" to church do so. He once made a slip of the tongue. I asked him what a *tchervonietz* is. His eyes sparkled. A *tchervonietz* is, he said, a gold draft. "If you are a foreigner or have a specialized skill, you can ask to be paid in gold. Then on the first you receive a *tchervonietz*-draft, in other words a gold check; you take it to the Soviet National Bank, present it, and they pay you with gold." "This is possible," he said firmly. "But it is not advisable," he suddenly added. He changed the subject, biting off his words.

I wrote down many things he said during our chess games, but I did not believe him. The details he reported were true, perhaps, but I had already learned that everything a Russian told me, the foreigner, had to be taken with a grain of salt, because they seldom told the truth. It was a great sport for them to fool us, the bourgeois Westerners. These conversations took place amid ear-deafening din. It was not just the war machines that rumbled around the house – the siege of Buda had already reached its peak in these days – not just the electric machinery and welding of the repair shop that droned, but a gramophone stolen along the way that squawked constantly. The soldiers had only one record, a Ukrainian children's chorus, a kind of caterwauling, shrieking song, more racket than music. They played it night and day; Sedlachek roused his workers at dawn with it; during the day and at night,

everyone who happened to pass by wound it up. At first this constant miaowing got on my nerves, but later I became used to this, too.

One afternoon I was calmly playing chess with the Communist from Moscow when a smoking, flaming figure, shrieking hideously, burst into the room; he threw himself on the floor and howled, holding his flaming leg to the sky. The room filled with the acrid stench of burned flesh and scorched skin. One of the mechanics in the welding shop had caught fire when a gasoline blowtorch exploded in his hand. This burning, smoking mass of flesh lay wailing in the middle of the room; his comrades gathered around him, sat down and watched him writhing in pain, waiting silently and motionlessly for the army doctor to arrive. The record on the gramophone kept screeching the song of the Ukrainian children's chorus. The taciturnity with which they regarded the human pain, the rattling sound in the man's throat, the miaowing song – all this mingled very strangely. Once again, that "difference" stood out in their nature, in the attitudes that the rest of us who are not Slavs cannot fathom.

13

At this time, two women were raped in our village. One attacker was arrested, I have no idea what happened to the other. News about the raping of women reached us only sporadically from the neighboring village; we heard of many more such episodes from the little town nearby, where after a few days women and girls hid in groups in the basement of the local hospital at night. But high commands were billeted in the villages, and attackers were exceedingly visible and thus feared punishment. A year later, after the Russian army had withdrawn from the area, a truck stopped one afternoon in front of one of the houses on

the outskirts of our village; Russian soldiers got out casually, entered the house, and began to abuse the wife of a village proprietor, and when he rushed to protect her, they shot him and took to their heels. I report this episode only because I personally saw the victim's body. Others related other, more terrible acts. No one ever heard anything further about the assailants. During this early period, in the first months of the war and occupation, outrages in our village and its immediate environs rarely occurred. Elsewhere it was otherwise; news of atrocities spread slowly but steadily.

Of course, the Russians continually rutted around the women in our village, too. Our situation in the little house on the edge of the village wasn't entirely without danger; after all, I lived alone with two women for weeks among Kirghizians, Chuwash and other savage men. Nevertheless, a kind of constantly alert demeanor, the polite but firm tone of rejection, the firmness of inner resistance — if they got wind of this in someone, they often grew docile. It happened that they turned to me with incredible requests. One afternoon a Georgian named Anatol, a mechanic in the *mashtierskaia*, turned up in the kitchen, where my wife, our female lodger, and half a dozen women from the village peeled potatoes day and night for the Russians. He was a simple man, young; he suffered from carbuncles and showed his carbuncular neck anxiously every morning, asking me to paint the ulcers with iodine.

Now this carbuncular Anatol darted toward the women in the kitchen in an acute fit of sexual passion, and when he spotted me, he stood in front of me and began imploring me to "get him a woman!" I replied that I do not engage in such matters, that he should turn to the village beauties and court them, and he will certainly find an understanding companion among them. But Anatol could not be contained. He is healthy, he shouted, the regimental doctor is here, he

is willing to be examined. Look, he has money – and he yanked a thickly stuffed billfold from his jacket pocket – he has a watch, he will give me everything, but I must get him a woman.

The shouting, arm-waving Russian now started to cry. He sobbed uncontrollably, like someone suffering from a great physical need, like someone starving or thirsting, who was being denied a bite of bread or a sip of water. The women squatting on the kitchen floor gazed soberly, with interest at the weeping Russian begging for love. The scene clarified something about the always somewhat baffling characteristics of the great Russian novels, the novels of Tolstoy, Gorky and Dostoevsky, when the Baron Vronskys, the Artamonovs, the Mitia Karamazovs explode in the heat of sexual passion and behave foolishly, unintelligibly. I assisted the weeping Russian to the vestibule. He left in low spirits, like someone who is bewildered and past consolation. I returned to the kitchen and found the women in an embarrassed state of mind. In their view there was absolutely nothing to laugh about in the sexual need of this Russian raging and wailing like a teenager. They peeled the potatoes in silence, reflecting on what they had witnessed.

On another evening, I had an even more unpleasant encounter with a Russian in an amorous mood. This lad was hunchbacked; he tended to his appearance with the fond aspiration found in men with deformed bodies, often summoning the village barber, who – he was also a hunchback! – groomed the vain cripple's hair gently. One night the two of them got hold of some wine, and after work, toward midnight, when we, the household residents, had retired for the night in the lair assigned to us, the hunchback in his tipsy mood and amid the endless vexation of the Ukrainian children's chorus – knocked on our door and shouted: "Ilonka, come out!"

It was not difficult to imagine what this de-

mand meant. Ilonka was the interpreter, and we had noticed earlier that the hunchback was ogling and hanging around her with a contorted grin. I put on my robe and passed through the adjacent room between the tipsy and lustily singing Russians. I felt like the lion tamer when he has to enter a cage of restless wild beasts. I closed the door leading to our room behind me and stopped directly in front of the hunchback. I threw my back against the door and stood there with arms folded, motionless and silent. The hunchback was grinning; he bent down slightly as if preparing to leap and looked up at me and growled, still grinning:

"Ilonka, come out!"

Drunken Russians sat on the floor and benches next to the wall, waiting silently to see what would happen. Their besotted, oafish faces reflected the sort of curiosity seen when the circus audience watches the trainer handling a rebellious beast. And actually, at this moment – I felt this in my whole body – I knew that everything depended on my attitude and intonation; if I revealed any inner weakness, if I showed fear and began pleading with the inebriated cripple, I would cause incalculable trouble. This is why I did not move; I just stood at the door and looked him in the eyes.

He approached slowly, stealthily. When he stood before me I extended my hand, touched his shoulder and said something to him. I spoke in Hungarian quickly and quietly. Seriously, with stern intonations I said something like: what he is planning to do is inhuman. And I touched his shoulder. The moment that followed seemed endless. Suddenly the hunchback turned away and, grumbling furiously, went to the door and slammed it shut behind him. The others began to applaud the way spectators extol the lion tamer after accomplishing a daring feat. There was no trouble later; that night and those following passed without threat to the women's safety.

Nearly all the Russians were gentle and kind with children. Somehow it was in this, their feelings about children, that they preserved their inner bent for humaneness. An eight-year-old lived in our house, a little boy who had fled to us from the Germans and the Arrow Cross. The child whiled away the days contentedly in the historical chaos; he romped happily among the machines, the dirt and the foreign men; he was glad there was no school and didn't have to wash up, and he did his bit diligently in the general circle of thievery that erupted like a neurosis among the men of the village, too. Every instructive reprimand was futile; he ambitiously "looted" tools, nails, mostly worthless objects from the Russians, and stuffed them into his own little robber's lair in the attic. Sometimes the Russians caught the little fellow red-handed, but they never hurt him. They waved their hands, struck his back, pulled his ears, then gave him an apple or a piece of bread.

A Russian boy-soldier also arrived with the company; he was twelve years old, a handsome, bright-eyed little fellow. He wore a regular army uniform and strutted around in it; it even had some kind of insignia. According to every indication, this boy could have been a *bezprizornik*, a nobody's child dressed in a uniform, the kind that roamed Russia at the time of the revolution by the hundreds of thousands in gangs, threatening public safety; they wandered over the Russian plain, cut off from all human ties. When he passed by me and I looked at him in a friendly way or spoke to him drolly, he raised his fist, swished his whip, indicating I should beat it; he sized me up with eyes shining with hatred and motioned for me to move on. To him I was the ancient enemy it was not proper to fraternize with.

I would have liked to learn whether I was such an ancient enemy to the adult Russians as well. After all, I was the "bourgeois." The mess chief, a cheeky,

skirt-chasing young man from Leningrad – he said that in peacetime he was the bath secretary at one of the spas in the Crimea – would call out any moment to one of the women peeling potatoes: “Run over to the bourgeois and get two kilos of onions.” I was a bourgeois in their eyes, if different from the one “who lives on his own wealth or on the labor of others”; I was a bourgeois because “I preserved something in my soul.” (Later, I often recalled this characterization. The Soviet system, I quickly learned, wanted to take away from me precisely what “I preserved in my soul.”) I tried to find out whether these men hated me. After all, in their eyes I belonged to the enemy, the Hungarians, the middle class. I would have liked to know whether these Russians were truly “Communists” and how a “Communist” viewed me, the foreigner, the non-Communist. Sometimes I recollected a statement of the aged Freud, who in one of his last books heaved a sigh and said: the Communists took away private ownership from man because, in their opinion, it incites him to aggression, but Bolshevik society remained aggressive without the ownership of private property. This, I now saw, was true.

In addition, these men hung on openly and childishly to their own paltry and meager personal possessions. And what was even more surprising, they largely respected the well-dressed, well-mannered, thus “different” individual. Good deportment, proper outward appearance, and the “white hand” exerted an influence on them. Before the Russians’ arrival malicious oracles urged the “bourgeois” class to spin a rough, milled screw in their palms all day, because the Russians would do away with everyone whose “palm is not rough,” – but in reality, there were many Russian snobs who conspicuously sought out the company of well-mannered, well-groomed, thus “different” individuals.

My guests found a dog-eared copy of an old pre-

war American periodical, the illustrated *Esquire*, on the bookshelf in the living room. This American magazine was constantly in their hands; they thumbed through it in their spare time; Russians also came from neighboring houses and snatched the crumpled issue away from their fellow lodgers. They bent eagerly over the text and pictures printed on shiny, heavy paper. Of course, they were not reading the stories – they didn't understand a single word of English – they were not even looking at the humorous cartoons. It was the advertisements that fascinated our fellow residents and callers: the advertisements that gave information about electric refrigerators, men's suede shoes, the latest line of tennis rackets, trouser belts cut out of chamois leather and distinctive jewelry; the superfluities of an "aphrodisiac civilization" (this is Bergson's expression). An experience with selection and quality was what they were getting to know through the tattered American magazine.

The Soviet system, which took everything from them in the tremendous devastation of the revolution, invented for the Russians, through the course of thirty years, not just the Stalin organ or the turbines required by the Dniepropetrovsk power plants; it slowly and reluctantly invented and put at their disposal bicycles, galoshes, gramophones, and other not exactly "essential" appurtenances. They spoke of this proudly. But now, when they saw in the American picture magazine what is "possible" beyond "necessities," they clearly fell into deep thought. Then these reflecting Communists thought even further about what they saw when they returned to the Soviet Union from the West, and Stalin gave several millions of these day-dreamers the opportunity to digest behind barbed-wire fences what they had seen. But, I repeat, I did not nor do I now attach the far-reaching reveries to these meditations.

Did they hate me, the different kind of human

being, the bourgeois? ... When they spoke of hatred, they repeated memorized texts; they parroted lessons; they rattled off the seminary text dutifully and readily. Were they "Communists"? But what is a "Communist"? During these weeks, I met only intimidated, overworked and alienated men with atrophied souls. The filth which their presence spread throughout the house was truly Asiatic; it exceeded proportions caused by the hardships of wartime conditions. This was the *barbarie puante*. When I was alone I tried to recover from the day's experiences. And sometimes, in amazement, I sensed that beyond the aversion their persons and behavior inevitably aroused in me, too, I felt sorry for them.

14

In this situation privacy was the great, the only luxury; still, in the wild mechanical and military torrent that flooded our house and the environs, I somehow managed to create a daily routine within whose scope I could make notes and even read during the daytime for a few hours in our own separate lair. In the room next door, the Ukrainian children's chorus miaowed and screeched, the Kirghizians and Chuvashes yelled, slammed doors and made their machine tools groan; I nevertheless succeeded in remaining alone behind the wall, in our lair, for a few hours every day.

I read Spengler during these hours. I didn't choose to read his book; there simply was no other work worthy of attention at hand. This noted, pessimistic work was a strange one to be read in our life situation. I last came across it ten years before, and I retained no cogent recollection of it. Back then, the Nazis began their onslaught, Rosenberg was shouting his suspect sermons about the "new myth" from the

housetops, Nietzsche was prompting somewhere behind the scenes, Fichte was murmuring his dangerous preachments even deeper in the murky recesses of the Teutonic soul, and ten years earlier, Spengler's book also served the Nazis' aims. What Spengler calls the "Faustian spirit" is a spirit fraught with suspicion and danger; already fermenting in it is everything that later fatefully stirred the Germans in the "plebeian manner" in the Nazis' interpretation. The Stoa and Buddhism, thus the "Eastern" attitude, became – so I mused – views not to be dismissed as lightly as the "Faust-spirited" Spengler thinks; both provide a mode for creation, and thus for evolution. And Goethe, the poet of *Faust*, is truly the supreme proof that an "Apollonian" spirit can be as valuable a creative force as the Faustian personality constantly fleeing to the "deed" can be.

The Nazis – I had to think of them while reading in midst of my Kirghizians – could thank Spengler for some things. But in the midst of my suspicion and reading, several statements of his famous book struck me anew. What Spengler wrote about the difference between the "deed" and "work" – "deed" is a human ideal, "work" only a social responsibility – now, when in the next room – and a world ravaged everywhere around me by the Russians – the figures of a society reared for work, actually for an institutionalized and fixed drudgery were present – at this moment, when I was reading the book for the second time, the distinction seemed to make sense. I have felt at other times, too, that in life's critical situations an invisible hand, selecting fatefully, puts that reading into our hands which – in one way or another, sometimes in a roundabout way – responds to the problems of the particular moment. Somehow, that was what happened now, during the strange weeks when I re-read Spengler's great pessimistic work.

For, while the men of a society reared for

"work" – "work" and "drudgery" are synonymous in Russian – prepared tumultuously for something in the next room – and this enterprise involved not just the capture of Buda but something greater and different: the appearance of a System on the world stage, Spengler convincingly proved his own ominous thesis about the "simultaneous" fading of the great cultures and the abrupt disappearance of their forms of expression. What the German philosopher of history wrote about the death agony of chilled and rigid cultures, the megalopolises, and the "cycles of imperialistic wars" was somehow being enacted before my eyes even as I read. It was difficult to deny the anguished truth when "the second chapter of the cycle of imperialistic wars" was a palpable, bloody reality, a tangible illustration of exactly what I was reading. And no extraordinary imaginative faculty was needed for contemporaries to see looming behind the recent adversity the third phase of the "cycle": in reality, the "winter epoch" had also arrived. During these weeks, very few elements of the "palaeoanthropic conditions" were really missing in our lives.

Nevertheless, a question could be heard above the mixture of my reading and the experience paralleling it. Then and later, I kept asking myself: do these men and the system that bred them actually represent only the end of something, the end of the concept of Christian humanism, or is there something commencing in this dismal, clattering, earsplitting din? The Chuwashees, the Kirghizians, the Russians, the entire Eastern caravan left the Soviet Union to crush, with the help of the Anglo-Saxons, the war machine of German imperialism and to defend their homeland. In addition, it was the task of this gigantic army to establish the future security of the Soviet Union, to seize hostages and pawns under the Red Army's flags, and, to the extent possible, to spread the Soviet system throughout the world. This was the political meaning

of everything that turned into reality before our very eyes during those weeks. But is there an additional meaning to, the Soviet army?

Spengler, accompanied by the singing of the Ukrainian children's chorus, convincingly proved that the Christian-humanist culture of the Western Empire had reached the season of decay, of cooling. Was it possible that the men from the East in the adjoining room were not only destroying but instilling something with the first, barbaric gestures of a new attitude toward life?... Many have written splendidly about the course of a culture's destruction, and Spengler is only one of many who have chanted a dirge over our cultural epoch. But up to now, no one had written about how a culture begins. Is it conceivable that this barbaric army wants not merely to destroy and loot but to bring something for the West from the East some day? It appeared as if this was the question the young Russian soldier on that foggy Christmas afternoon addressed to me, to every human being, to everyone living in this critical stage of Western civilization. This is how I ruminated while, during the bloodiest days of the siege of Buda I read Spengler for lack of something better to read and listened, meanwhile, to the earsplitting racket of my guests.

The ensuing years answered this question, it seemed. Of course, not with a definite, not with an absolute "answer;" that kind of answer requires much time, possibly centuries. Those years replied only to the moment, and the answer, as I understood it, did not sound, in my view, as if the East could give impetus to Western culture. The great strength of these people, the Easterners, is that their dimensions are different. The Soviet system is the only aggressive system that can permit itself to step back if it has ventured too far forward: it has space to withdraw to. The Russian expanse, then the second dimension, Russian misery – which can still accommodate much more suffering –

and finally Eastern man's pliable sense of time: these are the dimensions within which the Eastern dictator can freely move, even when he executes retreats. Hitler and his fellow dictators in the West were always forced to move forward; to them backing down or even standing still was synonymous with annihilation. But the Russians – then the Chinese and the Orientals generally – have inner dimensions where it is difficult to pursue them. This is the source of their strength but also their weakness. The men I came to know during these weeks and observed later in many different guises were, on the surface, exactly like the Westerners, but their awareness of their own personalities did still not correspond to Western man's individual self-consciousness.

This Pjotr, this Fedor, this Anatol underscored their personalities with pride and self-respect, but there was around and within them some kind of slackness and formlessness in which their fateful awareness of their individuality was not so absolutely established as in the consciousness of Western men. They were individuals and personalities, but less so than the volatile Swabian miller in the neighboring village or the gardener who was a true-born Hungarian and thus came from the East and had lived in Hungary in a different kind of self-consciousness for a thousand years, and thus he was much more resolutely János and Pista than these Russians. Eastern man always exudes some sort of impersonality, and that is just as much a "dimension" into which he can submerge himself, into which he can retreat as he can into time and expanse and Eastern misery. Contemplating these men, I recalled all I had once read in a leisurely period about the teachings and practices of the Buddhist mystics, the famous *yogas* and *munis*. These Eastern Buddhist mystics profoundly scorned "miracles," the healings, because they saw nothing extraordinary about humans creating a connection with their inner organs

under the control of some fakir's practice, directing their heartbeat and sending messages to their endocrine glands. They found the magnificent and final end in the dissolution of the personality, when a human transcends his individuality and "mingles with the world rhythm." To me, to the Westerner, this attitude truly sounds Chinese or Hindu, because if I "relinquish my individuality" – this strange obsession – I have abandoned the meaning of my relations with life.

Eastern man doesn't feel that way. And now, when I observed and experienced directly this different consciousness of the personality, this looser, less confined dimension for individuality, it sometimes seemed I would comprehend that only in the East could a large "collective" social experiment be realized which attempts to strip the individual of an ever critical consciousness of his own personality and hoist him into the dimension of "community" consciousness, the "social personality". Mingling, dissolving in the crowd can be euphoric for Western man, too, but the attempt to achieve it cannot be the object of his life. This is what I experienced, what I came to see among the Russians.

I think that this was for me the only real observation during these weeks and the several years I spent in the system and the community of Eastern men. My own "*j'ai vecu*" was exceedingly inconsequential in these days and later as well. It wasn't worth mentioning. But the chasm I glanced into – this chasm yawned between Eastern and Western man's consciousness of the personality – was indeed an adventure.

During these days, I sometimes exchanged words with a man who got stuck in the village for the duration of the war emergency with his family; earlier he had been the chief editor of a Catholic daily. A severe physical handicap afflicted him: he was totally deaf, and in the afternoons, when we would occa-

sionally meet on the bank of the Danube, we passed on, at the top of our lungs, our "military secrets," our radio news to each other amid the roaring Russian canons and rumbling engines of war, the way one has to speak to a deaf person. Hungarian police arrested him in the weeks following the siege (four years later he was to be sentenced to ten years in prison at the Mindszenty trial, in which he was one of the accused). There were no grounds for the charges against him, but he was the chief editor of a Catholic newspaper, thus suspect in the eyes of the People's Democracy, and for this reason he was imprisoned for several months. First he spent several weeks in the infamous house at 60 Andrassy Road, in the cellar of the Communist State Security Police, and then one morning the Russians loaded him on a truck and transferred him to a jail in a villa of the GEPU, the Russian military and political police. He spent weeks there. The police interrogated him several times but did not uncover any evidence or documents whatsoever against him, and eventually they set him free. He lived for several years in dire poverty but without restrictions, until he finally disappeared from the scene during the Mindszenty trial.

This fellow-writer related that while he was in the hands of Hungarian authorities, in the cellar of that notorious jail, the voices that spoke to him were harsh, the fare was wretched, and in the prisons the crowded conditions were suffocating, and the dirt was appalling; but he, the human being, the personality, felt all along that even in this deplorable state he still *existed*. Somewhere there was a document, a file number was legible on it, and this number represented him in the world, personally. His predicament worsened from the moment he got into Russian hands. In their jails, the Russians did not abuse him personally; the guard occasionally gave him a cigarette, and everything he participated in was casually routine. Still,

while he was a Russian prisoner, he could not escape for an instant the fear that in this Soviet system he had ceased to exist, had disintegrated as a person, that he was only a speck of dust being whirled along in an endless dust cloud above the gray Steppes. Others who returned home from the Russian camps also expressed this same feeling.

This is how we lived on, eyeing each other, the Russians and the different kind of human beings.

15

They disappeared from one hour to the next, exactly the way they had arrived. For two days the cannon fire and the rain of bombs were not as deafening. One evening, Sedlachek packed up his grandfather clock, and our guests began gathering up their things; they stuffed their "loot" into their duffel bags, their filthy packs. This loot consisted mostly of their sad and pitiful belongings, a beggar's pouch could have accommodated them, and at dawn they set out.

During the night, Hassan cooked an oxhead in the kitchen for them. He rounded up a few chickens in the village and served them chicken soup in several buckets for breakfast. They ate the soup and oxhead. The dirty floor of the room was covered with feathers, like after a demonic, witch-like all-night ball when the dancers shed their feather costumes. The detachment moved out without so much as a word. We, the residents, looked on in surprise at the Russians departing without saying goodbye, for we had, after all, lived under the same roof for weeks and gone through trying conditions, and we had also happened to exchange humane words. But it did not occur to any one of them to nod to us in farewell.

We were standing in the empty room in the dim light of the smoking oil lamp, when one of our guests

entered through the open door warily. It was the Ukrainian who always spoke to us courteously and once said scornfully: "You don't know the Russians yet!" The motor car in which he was assigned a place was already rumbling in the yard, but he had still returned to us for a moment. We thought that the forty-year-old bald and sympathetic Ukrainian just wanted to say goodbye. He stopped in the middle of the room and looked around cautiously, making sure everyone had left and we were alone. Then he beckoned to the interpreter and said confidentially, in a hushed voice:

"Tell him" – and he pointed to me – "if I knew languages I would not go back to Russia, I would stay in the West."

The interpreter translated softly.

"Why wouldn't you go back?" I asked.

"Because" – and he raised his forefinger – "things are not good at home."

These words of farewell interested me. I asked the interpreter to get him to explain what is "not good" back home.

The Ukrainian readily replied:

"It is not good because you have to work very hard and you don't get fair reward for your labor. Besides, there is no freedom. We don't study languages because they don't want us to read foreign languages. You can read only what they put in your hands. Books are my life," he said unexpectedly, "and I can't read what I want to. This is not good," he said soberly, sternly.

He fell silent, and then all of a sudden he said:

"My father was a Social Democrat, but they shot him to death. I want you" – and he pointed at me again – "to know this."

He stood wordlessly for a minute – it was a very long minute – and looked at us in the light of dawn, blinking. His eyes reflected a strange weariness and sadness. Then he bowed and with a waggish, mocking

motion presented me with a gold-bordered picture of Stalin, the kind the soldiers carried with them everywhere on their military campaigns. With a scornful and reverential movement – as if presenting a saint's picture or icon as a gift – he handed me the Stalin picture and made the sign of the cross. Then he left.

After the Russians' departure, the house and the yard showed the shambles of a general battlefield scene, a slaughterhouse, and a ruined machine factory. Here lay a disemboweled diesel motor, there an oxhead. About noon we heard that the Germans had surrendered Buda. During the night, we bundled sacks up, and my wife and I set out at the first glimmer of the following dawn on the twenty-kilometer road to Budapest, back to the city to find in some cellar my mother, brothers and sisters, and friends, whatever was left of the old life. As we neared the Buda section of the city, the picture changed at every street corner: the familiar area was a barely recognizable heap of ruins. We seemed to be passing through excavations. We wandered about in the wake of the Russians, identifying the old dwellings. The path was open. But we did not yet know where it led.

16

I found only some firewalls of my home standing. During the siege, it took three bomb hits and more than thirty grenades. I somehow climbed up to the second floor on the rubbish pile that rose from the rubble, the remains of the stairs, and the furniture fragments where the staircase once stood, and I caught sight of my top hat and a French porcelain candlestick on the top of the mushy pile of ruins that was once my home. Photographs were strewn about in the rubbish, including the one which long time ago, before the siege, hung above my writing desk and depicted Tolstoy standing

with Gorky in the garden at Yasnaya Polyana. I put this photograph in my pocket and looked around to see what else I could take as a keepsake. I made my way through the obstacles to the room where my books had lined the shelves. I would like to have found the bilingual Marcus Aurelius, then Eckermann's *Conversations* and an old Hungarian edition of the Bible. But it was difficult to get my bearings in the chaos. The blasts had, like some paper mill, ground the books into a pulp. Still, one book with an undamaged title page lay on the rubbish pile right next to my top hat. I picked it up and read the title: "On the Care of a Middle-Class Dog," this was its title. I stuck the book in my pocket and cautiously climbed down from the rubbish pile to the ground floor. At this moment – I later thought about this a lot – I felt a strange sense of relief.

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PART TWO

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"...That which the palmerworm hath left hath the locust eaten; and that which the locust hath left hath the cankerworm eaten; and that which the cankerworm hath left hath the caterpillar eaten."

(Joel, 1.4.)

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I did not immediately understand what lay behind this "sense of relief." But then, I didn't really have the time to rack my brains about its meaning; I had more pressing matters to tend to than the analysis of my muddled feelings. I had to find a roof for our heads, a bed and a table. Like Robinson Crusoe when a wave tossed him on the island after the shipwreck, I returned to the sunken ship with a raft – a two-wheeled handcart – to salvage the necessities for living. Everyone was engaged in this task: residents rummaged through the ruins in the big city day and night. It seemed as if rubbish removal were perpetually going on, but also as if some grotesque land settlement were under way. People reported boastfully that in the rubbish mound – it had been their home some weeks before – they had found an old hall clock or a bathtub. Others unearthed Persian rugs, not always their own and not even at their own places. When the siege ended, months of grim beauty befitting a romantic novel followed.

I put several damaged, broken pieces of furniture into a temporary accommodation in Buda and moved in with my family. I lived in this flat very silently but not exactly discontentedly for three years, from March 1945 to August 1948, when I left the country. Goethe said that when someone spoke to him about the annihilation of a nation, he began yawning because he knew that what he heard was only a platitude. But when he heard that a peasant's home in the neighborhood had burned down, he slept restlessly because he knew that what he heard was a real tragedy. During these years, I had similar thoughts. Much was being said about the "nation's destiny" and about how "everything will now be completely different." I only

saw that no one cared about the "nation," because everyone rushed to get a typhus inoculation and to replace broken windowpanes. And there was something encouraging to be found in these ferreting, disgruntled, bustling activities. People surmised that the nation would also benefit if they replaced broken windowpanes in their homes. Everything bellowed as "history" became insignificant, while the day's news – where one could get bread, shoes, medical help – was real history. This is how we lived then, in bombed-out Budapest.

The corner carpenter eventually glued the broken furniture together. Right after the siege, craftsmen like him – the vanguard of later "private entrepreneurship" – were "conquering heroes." Most of them worked only on their mettle for inflated pay, hence almost for nothing, considering that within days, later within hours, the great swindle, the paper leprosy, the inflation chewed up the *jancsibankó* they were paid with for their work. Despite this, some who took on work did turn up: the carpenter who pieced together a bed, a table and a wardrobe with broken slats, the glazier who installed glass in the window frames, the electrician who lighted up the city's darkened houses. Almost all these conquering heroes and manual crusaders of odd jobs were old craftsmen reared as Social Democrats who learned in a Hungary with the casino's honor codes and the arrogant displays of assumed superiority that there is another kind of honor, that the honor of labor is the most valuable and human of all forms of honor. Within a few months after the siege, these craftsmen pasted together out of the ruins a Budapest where town life could once again be led. Russian patrols with bayonets marched about on the streets. Soviet soldiers and roughnecks stole and stripped clothes off people. But in the ruined flats – as in the Middle Ages and at the beginning of modern times, the epoch of religious wars – residents were

again leading the lives of human beings, secretly, behind closed doors.

This was how I threw together some sort of roof over our heads when we lugged our belongings from the village to Budapest. We occasionally went to our demolished apartment, but the visits soon nauseated us. To plant ourselves in front of the ruins, like Jews at the foot of the Wailing Wall and bemoan our lost home – this was an uninviting task. Once the most essential practical articles had somehow turned up in the rubble, we abandoned the eerie visits. True, I did not gladly leave our books there to mildew. It was a relief to stumble upon a neighborhood bookseller who undertook to sort out the slightly damaged volumes from the jumble of the filthy, crumbly rubbish pile. We agreed that he would work for shares, and it turned out to be a good deal, for he rescued several hundred valuable Hungarian and foreign books for me and kept the rest and sold them as he could. Fortunately, he took many I was glad to get rid of; in short, the fashionable literary works publishers had burdened me with during the last decade and a half. This was a relief to me. When we divided the books between us, I got a complete János Arany, then a gapped Jókai series, lexicons, French and German books. When I placed them in order on the shelves, there was again, it seemed, a room in the temporary quarters where that strange and suspect profession could be pursued which Robert Musil characterized as *"gutgehende Schriftstellerei,"* or a flourishing literary career. The "dear master" could sit down at his desk and write if he chose to. The only question was: for whom? (And the other question, one I formulated only later, however: why? ...)

In any event, I consoled myself with the thought that I had reason to feel contented. I was again living in a room where I saw books lining the walls. The country lay in total ruin, so people said, but that was merely a flowery expression. In reality, the

country had not perished; to the contrary, it began to live very vigorously. There were those who complained because the flat, the villa, the magnificent furnishings, thereafter the bank deposit, the upper-class lifestyle, the whole factitious hierarchy, the neo-baroque snobbery had been obliterated. Others expected the Americans to come and chase the Bolshevik Russians back to the Soviet Union, and then everyone will get everything back again: the house owner the house, the landowner the land, and the nimble-penned, prolix writer the easy success. Everyone expected someone else to help. The peasants sniffed covetously at land distribution; at the same time, they were suspicious because they knew from a thousand-years' experience that what is handed out can also be taken back. Their wariness was justified. On the whole, however, everyone waited for the "temporary situation" to end and then, in the true Hungarian way, in accordance with local fashion, the good old life will again come to exist in Hungary.

The Communists winked and, in the beginning, maneuvered cautiously. Later, they repeated this wary maneuvering of the sniper in world politics. Sometimes they took a step, then looked around and watched silently to see what effect it produced. If they suspected serious opposition, they stepped back prudently, in order to take two steps forward at the next turn. This was how matters proceeded for two years, to the spring of 1947. Then the maneuvering accelerated. The Kremlin decided that the Yalta agreement could be put into effect and the Soviet Union take possession of the countries bordering the West. When the Kremlin made this decision, the Hungarian Communists sent home from Moscow set about their work in earnest.

It was possible for us to live in our temporary quarters, and I could even write with a measure of self-discipline. In the first year after the siege, I submitted

two novels – I had written them during the war, but at the time there was no opportunity to publish them – and I occasionally wrote diary notes for a liberal daily. I beguiled myself with the notion that I would live and work under the changed circumstances just as I had before. Old friends emerged one by one from the ruins. Still, something in my life had basically changed.

Then one day I realized why I had felt that sense of relief when after the siege I again saw the ruined apartment house where I had lived for a decade and a half and where everything that meant something to me personally was destroyed: memories, atmosphere. I shall recount this as best I can. But before doing that, I would like to write down something at this point.

2

I don't know how it is with others, but whenever I think of a city, no matter whether Hungarian or foreign, I don't see a picture first, but hear a certain musical beat. Be it New York or Paris, Kolozsvár or Berlin, whenever some notion, some chance association of ideas flashes a city's name across my mind, I hear music. It seems as if to me a melody, a musical beat conveys the city's meaning. For example, if someone mentions New York in my presence, it isn't the panorama of Manhattan as seen from the one-hundredth floor of the Empire State Building that appears to me; instead, I hear for an instant some beats from Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*, several measures from this wailing and howling, doleful and delightful neurotic composition. I don't know the cause of this melodic recollection of a city; after all, I don't ever hear a musical signature when I think of human beings or landscapes. Among the phenomena of consciousness, in my view, the really frightful and mysterious are the ones that trigger the key action of remembrance; and this

rhythmic and melodic synchronism that the mention of a city's name flashes in my consciousness is just as incomprehensible as the enigmatic character of the storing and summoning up of memories in general. It seems that to me a melody is the trademark of a city, and I can't measure the timespan of this melodic cue; visual images immediately follow the cue without melody on the conveyor of recollection. These cityscapes are always in shades of gray in my recollection, never in color, just as I never see color in my dreams and always dream in black and white.

Budapest is the only city whose memory does not conjure up a melody in my consciousness. It evokes lines of verse instead. For instance, sometimes it automatically coupled with this wailing, despairing line from Babits: *"What concern of mine are the sins of the world?"* Thus did Jonah cry out in the beautiful poem by the great Hungarian poet when he learned that Providence did not exist, only facts. This line sometimes flashed across my mind when I thought of Budapest. It spoke to me like a text fixed on the sound-sensitive ribbon of a tape recorder.

But other verses are also registered on this tape which, in my case, reflexively begin speaking, activated by the mention of cities' names, including those I myself wrote long ago, when I still turned out a verse every now and then. During the siege, I did strum a few lines of verse in rhyme. I am not a "poet," missing from my sensibility, from my consciousness, is that distilling power which poetry is and which, with magical, sometimes demonic energy, catalyzes in a single word the elements of emotion and reason, the way that the nucleus of the atom catalyzes protons and neutrons. But occasionally I did write some rhythmic lines, and occasionally the "barbaric jewel," the rhyme, clanged at the end of a line. Among them were some that looked like verse, but the dense and potentially explo-

sive tensile power of poetry was missing. And without such a charge, there just isn't any "poetry."

Just the same, these home-made verses did sometimes speak up when I thought of Budapest. And a still photograph emerging from the repository of my memories immediately followed these verses: a Budapest street corner or a human face. It was as if the lines were the text for a picture in an album. Budapest and everything pertaining to this idea survived in miniature stills for me: a series of memories in photographs, many miniatures in an album that I leafed through periodically. These photographs did not show "action" like a film reel, but fixed, rigid pictures. And even as a medieval city with its sharp contours, battlements, churches, scaffolds and gabled houses, and garrulous residents loitering in a tiny square fit into the miniatures of the Flemish masters, so everything I lived through in three years, from the end of the siege to the time of my voluntary exile, remained palpable to me in the narrowly framed stills. They didn't "move": history is always a still photograph because whatever has happened is dead. I look at, regard my mementos of Budapest as if I were scrutinizing the bespectacled, stony-eyed, slightly comical, slightly frightening countenances of deceased relatives and acquaintances in a family album.

Twenty-five years, a brief generation, rolled by from the time I last saw Budapest. During these twenty-five years, rare was the day when I didn't look at something in my special album; it rarely happened that I didn't think of Budapest. And the pulse of solidarity always throbbed in my consciousness whenever I thought of this beautiful, extraordinary city. But there wasn't a single day during this quarter of a century when I thought of Budapest nostalgically. And every time I dreamt that I returned home, that I was at home again in Budapest, the dream was always painful and distressing. And waking up was always a

*All traces of zither and Gypsy have been blown
From the 'Broadaxe,' filled now by shadows and
stench alone
And side by side in the castle church lie corpses
Of dead princes and slaughtered horses..."*

4

These lines were not a poetic hyperbole: in the morning in the light of cold March – artillery still rumbled in Transdanubia, the forces of Soviet Marshal Tolbukhin were fighting the Germans and the Hungarian Arrow Cross retreating toward Vienna – I actually saw two dead horses abandoned in front of the tombs of princes on the stone floor of Matthias Church in Buda.

This episode occurred in the spring of 1945 – hence a year after that memorable name day when our family last sat together. Leaning on my elbows on the railing of the Bastion promenade, I could clearly see the scene below: the change that had taken place in a year's time. The only reason I went to Castle Hill on this March day was to look for someone. I didn't find him; he had died. At the time, telephones were still not functioning in Budapest, and the only way one could know anything for certain about the living and the dead was to look them up on foot. The house where the person I was looking for lived before the siege was also destroyed. Of the six thousand residents of Castle Hill, only six hundred remained in the district; the rest had died or fled.

I walked along the narrow streets of Castle Hill between what was left of the moderately grotesque little mansions of the "Hungarian Faubourg Saint-Germain." This stroll resembled that of Ulysses when he looked down into the pit of Hades. At the end of the promenade a half dozen old cannon barrels stood in place; the Museum of Military History displayed these

long bronze barrels saved from Turkish times. A warning sign stood guard next to them with this text: "Please do not touch the cannon barrels." This concern for a museum piece had surprised me some time ago, when I passed this way nearly every day on a stroll. One could understand why an official agency would warn civilians against cannons, but nowhere else, in any foreign country, did I ever see civilians warned against touching cannons. I walked the length of the Bastion, stopped at the top of the Granite Stairs and looked down into the depths through the balustrade.

The librettists of official Communist propaganda called this point in time, the conclusion of the Second World War, "The Time of Liberation." They spoke of this juncture as if it were a new basis for the computation of time, the new Before Christ and After Christ. They believed that the Hungarian people were liberated from the Nazi terror and now quite able to bear the Communist terror. And there were many who, because of their lineage or beliefs, had been hounded in the recent past. To them, the arrival of the Soviet army was synonymous with liberation – until the time came when they learned that they were now free to rot in prison in the Soviet colonial empire. Others, the majority of the country's population, did not feel that what occurred constituted liberation. The Hungarian language is terse, but its spirit is prone to rhetoric and expressions of pathos; it is succinctly rhetorical, and for this reason, the population defined what materialized in the wake of the Soviet army's arrival thus in realistic wording: "After the Siege" and "Before the Siege."

I personally didn't feel any sort of "liberation." I didn't even have any wounds to display; others had suffered and lost immeasurably. But now, when from the height I caught sight of the ruins where I had lived not so long ago, I understood that in the depths amid the destitution and devastation on the rubbish heap of his-

tory, not only had my home been destroyed, a caricature had also died. There was no "liberation" to be found anywhere, neither within me nor in the surrounding world, but there was a "deliverance," because ultimately the caricature was annihilated.

At least, that was what I supposed then. I didn't yet know that the law of the conservation of energy prevails not only in physics but also within the dimension of human destiny: the phenomenon who forms personality beyond organic reality never dies completely. During his lifetime, man not only acts, speaks, thinks and dreams; he also keeps silent about something. Throughout our entire lives we keep silent about who we are, about the one only we know and cannot reveal to anyone. But we know that the one and what we remain silent about is the "truth:" we are what we keep silent about.

But what do we keep silent about so anxiously, with tightly clenched teeth? In one of his works, Malraux – when he wrote it he was no longer a Court Writer, a parvenu Eminence in de Gaulle's household – spoke about how during his life man believes he is standing guard over some Great Secret. This is a misconception: man is not "A secret, the North Cape, an oddity," as Ady lamented, but the sum total of little secrets fit for the hollow of the hand, a tiny, grimy bundle. He guards those rotten little secrets with spasmodic and idiotic devotion, but it is not worth standing guard over this satchel of secrets, because shortly, at the instant of death or sometimes even sooner, it becomes apparent that there was no Great Secret of any kind in life. We have only residual, minute secrets which could have been disclosed to others and were not worth concealing. Secrets of the Role, secrets of Ambition, Envy and Family. Secrets of Sexuality ... in "Protean form," as psychoanalysts, the Talmudists of the abdomen, would have put it. Was all this worth concealing? ...

I now believed that the grotesque figure whom I was up to that point had perished in History, written with a capital "H": . And whom I had to own up to because "I" was indeed a caricature, too. And this caricature concealed the one who could not, dared not reveal himself; after all, man is not merely the "what" he is but always the caricature of himself as well. The caricature isn't humorous, genial, but always bitter, mean, vindictive. I supposed that at last the "bourgeois writer," then the "urbane writer," or the "dandy," had perished. And I couldn't deny that I actually fit the traits the caricature displayed and tagged. I couldn't assert that another person existed behind the caricature who had nothing to do with the "dandy" or the "bourgeois writer," then later with the neurotic hunter of experiences pursuing adventures, with the writer gamely turning out books, plays and news articles, with the rakish creature, the maniacal itinerant journeyman. Just as in a game of hide-and-seek in the nursery rhyme, I couldn't cry out that "your finding me doesn't count," because I was "this" and "something else" as well. But for a moment – true, it was a historical moment – I believed that finally this personal misconception, the caricature had perished. I could finally be what I am.

This is what I supposed, for a moment. It was a beautiful, unforgettable moment, as is every moment when one lies mitigatingly and openly to someone: to oneself or to someone else. I had not yet learned that man never frees himself completely from the misconception that takes form regarding his own persona: he can't do so because there is also some truth in the "misconception?;" the caricature that the world mirrors is just as much "him" as the "other" that he has been tight-lipped about throughout his life. For this reason, I didn't start screaming with the fury of the Old Testament and Ezekiel from the height of the Bastion Promenade; I looked down without any self-accusation

at the ravaged graveyard below, where everything that gave compass and content to my life until now had vanished. Instead I thought: at such great cost, but it had happened at last!

In the depths, among the ruins below, the "bourgeois" that I was lay – so I imagined – dead, moldering. Humans who belonged to the "bourgeoisie" were crawling in the cellars of demolished houses, under the roofs with gaping holes. Not so long ago, that sunlit emptiness in the depths had been my home, where "I lived my bourgeois life." It wasn't a "mansion," but something else, the home of a "bourgeois writer;" it belonged to us like the wellworn, expertly tailored garment one gladly puts on because it isn't subject to changes in one's time of life or in fashion. We had lived in this airy emptiness that had been my home for fifteen years after our return to Hungary from a six-year stay in Paris. (Now, for a moment, that rush of blood again: "Maybe it was a mistake to return." The immediate reply: "It was not a mistake, because I can write only in Hungarian.") Within the dimensions of this emptiness, in the home now gone, I wrote four dozen books, then thousands and thousands of articles, sketches, colorful verse-like things. Here I acquired (*lege artis*... This way, so as to ...) and honed my craft. I had every reason to weep, because everything was destroyed that held together and sustained from the outside who and what I was.

And – the momentary giddiness again – I couldn't feel genuinely and overwhelmingly sorry for what was fittingly destroyed in the depths. I couldn't howl and moan like a prophet in the desert over what had perished, because there was something in the depths below that I did not like. There was much of value, much beauty, many precious illusions. But nothing was really what it appeared to be, what I believed it to be. In fact, everything was really out of joint.

I was a bourgeois then (even though a carica-

ture); I am one today, in my old age, in a foreign country. To me, being a bourgeois was never a matter of class status – I always believed it was a calling. In my view, the bourgeoisie was the best human phenomenon that modern Western culture produced, because it was the bourgeoisie who created modern Western culture; when a senile social hierarchy was annihilated, it was the bourgeoisie who created balance within a universal order toppling in a handstand. The human breed cannot live without élan in the social sense either; if human beings are deprived of the élan of nation or race, they must be given the élan of class or of something else. They cannot survive without this element. Lenin didn't believe in the "class consciousness of the proletariat"; he knew that the proletariat was not "class conscious," and so the myth of the Party had to replace the myth of class. But this Party was not the assault squad of class-conscious proletarians; it was a plebeian grouping which proclaimed the end of the coupon-clipping bourgeoisie, of the class monopoly of profits and the means of production (and this was true) but said nothing about the new role of the bourgeoisie who had built cities, created culture and constructed Europe – that of elevating the amorphous masses into the realm of the bourgeois way of life. For this is what occurred everywhere in the West. Hawkings about the "new, progressive role" of the bourgeoisie were already being heard in the Hungarian publications that passed for the press at the time. The Communists knew that they were helpless without the intellectuals, and so they began strumming a love ditty on the mandolin about the "progressive liberal" bourgeoisie who had now finally attained their true role in the wake of the "reactionary" bourgeoisie who had lost theirs. The unsavory joke in Pest lived off suspicions that these troubadours wanted to compensate for their own incompetence when they lured the bourgeois into the Party, declaring that it was not only

someone with a grandfather who was a doctor that could become a doctor. There were some intellectuals who suspected that the bourgeois now needed not troubadours but Savonarolas who would shake them out of their torpid dismay. But there was no such bourgeois Savonarola to be found anywhere.

I continually quarreled with this class, this bourgeoisie. I, the bourgeois offspring of Upper Hungary, never felt at home in that bourgeois house and in that sphere of activity in Buda which now vanished amid the ruins. What was it that I felt was missing?

The atmosphere. The sustaining, the lively bourgeois atmosphere. (It was never lacking in Kassa. Among the Kolozsvárians I never felt this gasping for air, this lack of atmosphere.) But everything surrounding me in Budapest – the chief counselor of the government, the Honorable Sir, the servant-tormenting madam, the plutocrat of Lipótváros (he was the best sort in this panoptikon of heterogeneous pseudo-bourgeoisie in Pest) – all this was not, to me, a lively bourgeois atmosphere; indeed, it was, like myself, only a caricature of the memory that I brought from Kassa and guarded faithfully. I now realized that I never felt at home in this setting, in the circle of flourishing writers. I was searching for something, something that was continually missing. But what? To breathe my own air in my own world. This is what I missed, and perhaps this is why I took off from Hungary during these years whenever I could, at every opportunity for decades.

But, I thought, now I am finally back. And I looked attentively at the airy nothing that survived.

and Slavic. Other sources did not stock the Hungarian language anywhere; for more than a thousand years its vocabulary had to be assembled from loan words sometimes alien to its spirit. The Hungarian poet, when he dug up the deep layers of his consciousness, didn't always find perceptive concepts and appropriate words for the new phenomena; it seemed as if the language were day-dreaming, languishing some centuries further back.

In the twentieth century, Hungarian writers were still reading just as avidly, inquisitively and covetously as individuals with an urgent mission. They had to make up for the failures of a thousand years of seclusion, silence and asthmatic suffocation, because they had suffered from such a paucity of words – too few to impart to themselves the Great Secret, the “Hungarian,” and then the discoveries of “culture.” With other peoples, the ideas of “culture” occurred simultaneously; ideas constantly rose, mingled and condensed in the large linguistic regions. The Hungarian language remained word poor. Shakespeare, it is said, had 30 000 words for his use; I wonder how many words could Balassi, Pázmány or Zrínyi have had? For this reason, when Hungarian writers wrote – in every period, the Guardsmen writers even as the poets versifying in Pest cafés, Csokonai in wheezy pipe smoke even as Zoltán Somlyó in acrid cigarette smoke – they hastily smuggled foreign nutriments into the anemic, skeletal language, sometimes camouflaging loan-words beyond recognition, sometimes tastefully. Everything was scarce. The beautiful, secluded Hungarian language not only had to be protected, weeded and cleansed; through reading, it had to be replenished with the stimuli of other languages. (It had only one relative in the world, the Finnish, but no one other than linguists specializing in Finno-Ugrian comprehended this “relative.”) Hungarian, which, even after a thousand years of language practice in Europe,

still thirstily imbibed foreign nutriments, had to be fed vitamins. A Czech writer, if he felt the lack of an expression while composing, reached absently into the vest pocket of neighboring Russian, Polish or Southern Slav dialects and promptly found what was missing. But where could Hungarian writers turn? They fed this anemic intellectual metabolism by reading.

It was over there, there to the right that Kosztolányi read and wrote. Let us cast a glance to the right. We can see what remains of the poet's study. The tribes that carried the roots of the language when they left the marshy region of Lebedia, crossed the Carpathian Mountains, and slowly descended into the valley of the Danube and Tisza rivers brought few words with them, and they didn't read. At the time when the Hungarian tribes set out across trackless primeval forests, other peoples – the Greeks, Chinese, Hindus – were already reading so prodigiously that many kinds of words had worn away in their consciousness. On the other hand, the Hungarians, so linguists say, were at the time of their departure still in the "higher state of savagery." They didn't have enough words to recount in Europe all they had experienced and thought up to that point. They couldn't make themselves understood by those who already possessed a copious vocabulary, including hackneyed and tired words; they couldn't "exchange ideas." An idea requires words; without words there is no exchange, only a sensation in the consciousness, like an ant crawling on the skin. And the Hungarians had numbers for only one hand, for four or five fingers. And they weren't in a hurry to create words any more than they were in a hurry to occupy a country, because they didn't have a map or a set destination. They weren't searching for a "homeland," they were seeking grazing lands.

It was poets who later made a country out of the grazing lands. It is always poets who make countries out of grazing lands. Ezra Pound was right when

he declared that everything a people wishes for obtains its verification in poetry, for instance, as did Benedek Virág, here in the neighborhood, in one of the rotten hovels of Víziváros, where "he scrawled love songs with a goose quill." (Kosztolányi wrote this about him.) Kosztolányi recorded how – independent of Time and Space, which don't exist for the Spirit any more than they do for astronauts in the Void – he would one morning go from Krisztinaváros to Víziváros and call on the Holy Elder. He would read his poems to him aloud, and the old poet, "praising the power of poetry, would hand me an apple for my verses." No one in Hungary gave poets anything anyway, other than sometimes one poet an apple to another poet.

Kosztolányi, like Benedek Virág, like every Hungarian poet, knew that he had only one real homeland amidst the Slavs and Germans: the Hungarian language. All else was at all times foggy, flickering and mutable: the borders, the population. The language endured like a diamond. And it always had to be ground anew to make it sparkle. This is what Kosztolányi did. This is why, bespectacled, he read day and night in the room now reduced to a pile of rubble.

And while he read, this "urbane writer" and *homo aestheticus* – like a pickpocket wearing tails at some upper-class gathering he had slipped into (this upper-class gathering was world literature) – constantly purloined something for the Hungarian language. The Hungarians crossed the passes of the Carpathians on horseback or in horse-drawn carts, in two-wheelers, in covered wagons. Later, it was flaunted that Hungarians are an "equestrian people." Perhaps they still were in Virág's day. But in Kosztolányi's they no longer were, no matter what those who played polo or maintained racing stables said. In this period, whose debris now lay scattered about, Hungarians no longer rode horses. The equestrian nation had split the

roles in two: those who rode horses and those who ate them. There were more of the latter. But the Hungarian Conquest had to be completed, a language had to be created, a language whose luminous and expressive power would give meaning to the landscape, cattle and man. To this end, poets constantly read throughout the centuries. (Ancient Hungarian "runes" did not constitute writing, just as poetry and novels could not be written with Toltec, Aztec and Mayan glyphic script. Just as there is no Egyptian "literature," because the figures are rigid, do not move like letters – it is impossible to write the following with hieroglyphics: "Oh, fly slowly and sing a long while." This deficiency – the letters with which words can be put together – had to be urgently met, because until this occurred, everything would remain meaningless to Hungarians, and Hungarians would remain meaningless to the world; they were the stammering nomads of the intellect, brutish vagabonds.

For this reason, it was imperative for them to write with letters. This is why the "whiskered" Berzsenyi, the touchingly quixotic Kazinczy, the "disguised revolutionary" Arany wrote. Or the pipe-smoking, paunchy, delightful Jenő Heltai. Or the breathlessly whistling and wheezing, feverish and inspired Babits. Or the cooing Ernő Szép. The Attila József fleeing into Gauginish ornamentation. The magnificent old teenager with the unrestrained *flatus*, Lőrinc Szabó. They not only wrote out of rapture, they also read pantingly. They read from every period, in every accessible language. They translated Persian epigrams from German, Chinese lyric poems from English. They "cultivated" everything, for they had to fill the Hungarian language up with superfluous words beyond what were essential. They knew that literature begins with the superfluous. And the nation with literature. Like every Hungarian writer, Kosztolányi – down below, there in the mushy vegetation that re-

mained of his home – fed and purged the Hungarian language like a doctor of contagious diseases a desperately ill human at a time of infection.

7

At this time – in the year after the end of the Second World War – countless books appeared in the West about the writer's obligation to be "committed." Most of them examined the purpose of literature and the writer in time of class war from a Marxist viewpoint. One of them reached Buda. Sartre wrote it. I found out from this book that I was not "free" because the classless society had not yet become a reality.

The book made edifying reading at the time. The Communists hastened to announce in Hungary that most of the literary works the "public," hence a middle class possessing monopolistic dominion, read in the present century was "noxious literature". Sartre didn't say this. He recognized that the "bourgeois centuries" – hence the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – compelled many great writers to speak up, but they, so he held, were not free, because their public demanded that they present the illusions of the bourgeois system in their realistic, naturalistic or romantic works. "For whom did they write?" Sartre asked with scornful, rhetorical emphasis. The question resonated in the consciousness of a generation of disillusioned intellectuals with ominous intimidation.

And really – the question was timely above the ruins of Kosztolányi's house – for whom had Hungarian authors written in the present century, more precisely between two world wars, in the Hungary of Trianon? Who made up the "public"? For instance, for whom did Kosztolányi write?

The writer did not have a "public" – so Sartre expounded – until the end of the seventeenth century, be-

cause, as a social phenomenon, the writer wrote for a Maecenas until the passing of the feudal system: for a prince, or a bishop, or a few bibliophiles. Back then, the writer was "classical;" he only had the opportunity to create according to rigid and severe hierarchical rules. In the eighteenth century and then in the nineteenth, the writer did have his "public:" the middle class, whom Sartre and Marxist intellectuals portrayed with perverse consistency as monsters possessed by the monomania of class rule, the sole owners of the means of production, and the ruthless coalition of userers driven maniacally by the profit motive. Now, the writer, so they maintained, could write only if he served the ideas and interests of his new master, the middle class. No doubt, there were such writers in every period. But what they failed to mention was that the writers who broke out of the straitjacket of feudal classicism were, in the end, so unfettered in the middle-class hierarchy that they could herald the Enlightenment, the ideals of the French Revolution. Their "public," the bourgeoisie, not only emboldened them to do so, it also expected the words of liberation to come from them.

There is a hitch somewhere in this line of thought in other ways as well. The writer had a "public" before the invention of moving type; it was not only the privileged who applauded at the premieres of Greek and Roman dramatists, the anonymous "public" also filled the theaters; not only educated bibliophiles who already knew *Hamlet* in a folio edition were passionately fond of Shakespeare, but also the *misera plebs*, the nobodies in the peanut gallery, the illiterate rabble. Writers gained a "public" above class at the moment when book-printing was invented and the book ceased to exist as an object of art, as a mysterious devotional article. A hundred years after Gutenberg, Cervantes's novel became a bestseller. Erasmus published his satire on Folly, and, according to notions of that

time, multitudes bought and read it. The book was hailed everywhere in the world where the middle class had assumed the governing role in society. The social fact of this bourgeois role was acknowledged, but the Marxists denied its legitimacy. A generation of twentieth-century intellectuals perceived the future of the "liberated writer" to lie in a classless society. Only a very few turned up who suspected that in the "classless society" – something that does not exist, never did and never can, because without classes there are only masses, not a "society" – writers, for whom the masses never feel any need, quickly wind up in the limbo of society.

But for whom did Kosztolányi write? And Babits? Ady and Móricz? In any event, not for the arrogant gentry, nor for the lout who had feathered his nest. Good writers, who felt literature conveyed an evangelical message, often wrote without a response, always amid modest, sometimes wretched living conditions. But for whom? Over and above the list of successful readable and cozy literature of the petty bourgeois there was also a Hungarian literature of high quality. Who read it?

The peasant didn't read. The élite level of the working classes in the city raised under Social Democracy did read, but what? Were their literary standards higher than those of the petty bourgeois? They read Jókai, and rightly so, for even today there isn't anything more genuine, more beautiful and better to read in the Hungarian language. Next they read, thanks to cheap publications, to paperback ventures, sometimes with the Party's help, what the "progressives" among the middle-class intellectuals put into their hands: that Western literature which presented the works of writers – Zola, Wells – who pled the case of the working masses. But they were not ready for books demanding higher intellectual effort.

For the writer, a veil of mist enveloped the

reader who understood Kosztolányi and his exacting contemporaries. Generally, women read more sensitively and considerably more than men of their own social class. Not just girls in their teens or bluestockings infatuated with literature, but "women" as a "class," as if women readers were hoping that "the writer can tell them" what the reader is thinking. University students read: in those days the young had not yet flocked to technical specialties; there was still an interest in humanities courses, if not so deep-seated as when I was in secondary school at the beginning of the century, when – far exceeding the list of "required reading" for the literary and debating society – we sixth-graders vied with each other to read everything that reached us from world literature, sometimes in faulty, crude translations.

In Upper Hungary and Transylvania, in the annexed parts of the country, lived an intelligentsia for whom – as a national minority in the Trianon decades – the good Hungarian book was an affirmation of life. (During this period, the Jewish community in Upper Hungary and Transylvania spent more on Hungarian books than the entire land-owning class between the Danube and the Tisza.) There was then in Hungary a silent, impoverished, petty bourgeois intelligentsia, settled in civil service, who preserved literary culture in dilapidated mansions in the provinces or in inferior housing in the cities. They were not great in number, but they had a calling, a stimulating role. These shy Hungarian readers were almost invisible. The wall partition at the National Institute for Social Insurance hid the real social condition of the nation. After the Compromise of 1867, the aristocracy no longer shouldered its role of preserving culture; most of them comported themselves as if the nation were a piece of entailed property and a hunting ground. The literary standards of the pushy gentry and the role-starved louts were deplorably low. But the Hungarian and

foreign books lining the glass-doored bookcases in my father's library in Kassa were not a room ornament, and many more such libraries were to be found in the provinces than in Pest. Readers existed somewhere. But Hungarian writers did not see their readers' faces.

A writer needs to be familiar with his reader's face. He doesn't want to see this face at the display booth of the "author's night," but otherwise: the way a medium sees the outlines of the summoned personage in the materialized plasma. A literary work is not merely what the writer (and the book) is saying, not even the manner of presentation; it is, above all, the atmosphere encompassing the work. The book will be "alive" in this atmosphere; otherwise, it will be like the cold celestial bodies that shine but have no life on them. This atmosphere does not cease to exist at the moment of a writer's death. Just as in real life, there are literary personalities who die slowly, and when they do die, something always remains of their essence that springs from the atmosphere pervading their works like the distinctive hair or fingernail of a deceased. Thus is Tolstoy's personality alive, thus is Proust alive. Kosztolányi wrote for the moment, he produced atmospherically, but after his death, a miniature masterpiece enough for a lifework remained in the discarded little pieces.

In order for a work to remain alive, the writer must know if this special being, the reader, this dialectical phenomenon that is both an ally and an enemy exists somewhere in the present or in the future, this phenomenon that invites and at the same time spurns. There is something sensual in this phenomenon, something inviting and threatening. The reader is the partner, like the woman in the love relationship. And the publisher, this midwife and procurer – when did he drop out of the picture? During Kosztolányi's creative years, this hazy personal relationship between the writer, publisher and reader still existed. Today, it no

longer does. In the West, commercial and industrial civilization demands bulk products from the writer to satisfy mass tastes and in the East political dry goods, ideological standards measured with a yardstick. Kosztolányi didn't live to see the day when for publishers literature became only something extra that they added as a bargain to their schedule of lip-smacking trashy novels and pseudo-scientific technical books, the way the butcher slams a fat piece of meat to the pickings. He didn't live to see the day when the literary work that found a publisher became suspect, because readers rightfully sniffed out that it wasn't the book that had reached the publisher but the writer through Mafioso-like tactics. The day when dilettantes wrote books for a stipend about the lives of creative writers by the job and, meanwhile, quacked away in their pompous excitement before the public, like ducks laying eggs. The day when, instead of *belles-lettres*, more books were written about books than books that were beautiful and literary. He didn't live to see all this, because he was a lucky fellow when, a decade earlier, he died of throat cancer over there opposite on the hill, in St. John Hospital.

Kosztolányi did not live to see the day when literature – which is also something more and something other than books and writers, just as religion is something more than ceremony and priests – dropped from sight through Time's trapdoor. Kosztolányi and his contemporaries still perceived something different under the entry-word "Literature" than do those writing today. For them literature was still simultaneously play and ritual, conspiracy and craft, Eleusinian rite and complicitous compact sealed with blood. Kosztolányi no longer saw the reader's face clearly either, but he still believed that he existed somewhere. A statue to the Nameless Writer, to Anonymous, had been raised somewhere in Budapest. The Anonymous Reader had not yet been so honored. He would be de-

serving of a statute. It just isn't possible to carry on a dispute in the dark. A hundred years ago, Flaubert and Maupassant knew exactly who their readers were, the ones for whom they wrote their masterpieces. They wrote for the French middle class. A half century later, Mauriac and Proust still wrote for the middle class. In post-Trianon Hungary, the Hungarian writer no longer saw the eyes of the reader, the eyes of his mysteriously remote, yet tangibly present collaborator, his inquiring or unsympathetic glance. Perhaps this was so because a middle class no longer lived in Trianon Hungary in the same sense as in Upper Hungary or Transylvania. The reader's sensibility was not granted a permit to cross the frontier to look the writer in the eye; they knew about each other, but they sent messages from afar via shortwave. The relationship was distant and unfamiliar.

Kosztolányi didn't know exactly for whom he was writing. Still, when he completed the daily reading that was more mandatory than the writing, he quickly wrote something down – in green ink hurriedly. He wrote a lead article every day, a piece of dramatic criticism, a short essay, polished a couple of rhymes for a poem he was working on, and wrote a manuscript page for the new novel. Or he translated. Every Hungarian writer who knew a Western language felt duty bound to translate. (Jókai, Mikszáth, and Krúdy didn't translate, because they didn't know a foreign language.) The generation of Arany, Vörösmarty, and Petőfi translated with the same scrupulous sense of duty as the *Nyugat* generation did, because they knew that the act of translation was an exacting task involving more than the intellectual conversion of words into the Hungarian language. They knew that translating is like an undertaking in which someone deciphers a secret writing, a *code*. Indeed, in every language, it is not only the writer who writes but also the language, the language that interrupts the writer's

text with shouts and grimaces. This practically untranslatable *code* is at the base of every foreign language. Foreigners – writers or travelers – coexist with another language; sometimes they already think they know its secrets and can safely say something, for example this: “I was in the city this morning.” But possibly the native hears it like this: “I was in the fortification at early dawn.” And he nods politely and grins bewilderedly. Every translation is a distortion. Still, Hungarian writers translated, Kosztolányi, too, even though he knew that only meaning could be translated, never the hint, the cue. The French, the English writer knew his public; he wrote in a jargon; he spoke to readers from a class culture leveled off by complicity, and he knew they would understand him even through hints, or at least not misunderstand him. The Hungarian writer didn’t know for certain what the reader would make of the tacit inner content of the text, which in the language of the theater, dramatuges call an “overtone.” (Toward the middle of the century, it was advisable to put every ironic allusion within quotation marks; the reader had to be notified that the writer wasn’t explaining what he was saying word for word, but only playing with an idea.)

Kosztolányi knew this, too. He knew that one can write only in a state of unconsciousness, in a *trance* as it were, and, at the same time, with such resolute awareness of everything, like a mathematician constructing a linear equation. He wrote that a masterpiece must be executed like a heinous deed. He committed such a lesser or greater foul deed every day. And he hurried because when he wrote he was not only saving the nation but saving himself, too; indeed, he had to live immediately, that very day – with family, friends and lovers – on what he wrote. At the same time, he knew that this “craft” with which he made his living was also the kind of undertaking in which someone conveys thoughts through frequencies and oscilla-

tions, instead of words. He knew that when he prepared an article for a daily, he had to write in several ways simultaneously: as St. Paul taught us when he sent word to the Corinthians: "I will sing with the soul, but I will sing with the understanding also." When someone "sings with the soul," that is poetry; when he "sings with the mind," that is prose with the strength of radium. He sang with his heart and mind. And he sang urgently because he needed the money.

Few writers turned up in Western literature who could make their livelihood by publishing *feuilletons* and featured articles. A hundred years ago, Théophile Gautier wore his hair down to his shoulders like Dürer in his self-portrait, or Michelangelo's Moses, or the hippies. And he did make a living by writing *feuilletons*. But this rarely happened. Gautier spent a lot of money; he maintained a carriage with red spokes and white ponies in Paris, and he made his money by writing *feuilletons* and travel accounts for French newspapers. There were years when he wrote a newspaper article nearly every day. His contemporaries couldn't understand how it was possible for him to write lofty verses and good books alongside such "trifles." It seems it is possible.

Kosztolányi was the Hungarian example demonstrating that it is. He didn't keep a carriage, he lived modestly, but for thirty years he, too, wrote a feature article nearly every day for the dailies. Now, when the ruins of his house could be seen clearly – all that remained of this effort in tangible reality – one could examine more closely the tremendous deception of the self and the world present in the way Hungarian writers coyly concealed the secrets of their livelihood. Kosztolányi wrote a little masterpiece every day because he had to make a living. He didn't make much through these endeavors, just enough to earn his daily bread. ("Brioche, you rascal, brioche!" he shouted with grotesque self-reproach when he called himself and

the world to account for the writer's opportunities for a livelihood in one of his pieces.) What he wrote hurriedly with his left hand was always perfect. It wasn't just the great *flatus* that prodded him not to publish a slipshod piece of writing; the daily competition forced him not to show any moments of weariness or weakness. Whatever he wrote in this fashion, hurriedly, was possibly perfect because he didn't have the time to polish what wound up in his hands. He knew the typesetter was waiting for it. And, most important of all, he hoped the reader was also waiting for it. That reader had no face, but somewhere this mysterious being lived who responded demandingly when he was addressed demandingly. Only the shallow writer believes that the secret of success lies in having the writer "descend to the reader's level." Like every good writer, Kosztolányi tried to rise to the reader's level. And he hurried because he had to make ends meet.

No one in Hungary cared about what a writer was living on. This unconcern was institutional. A writer who could scrape together enough for a modest house in Buda was as great a rarity in Hungary as if it was discovered that a mendicant Franciscan friar secretly played the stock market and made profits. In the shabby literary cafés in Buda and Pest, sallow and agitated writers discussed what one or another of them was living on. A trip abroad was a cause for suspicion, a summer holiday in Abbazia or the Tátras a pretext for a charge of ritual libel. "Pal, you've eaten, your teeth are bloody!" the hungry wolves called out in the Central Café when the revolving door spun around once and a writer or a poet entered in a new suit. Everyone knew what everyone else was "making" it on. Attila József "never reached two hundred forints a month". Babits was a teacher, like Mallarmé, thus poor, and everyone let the matter rest there. Dezső Szabó was a teacher, too, but then he retired, and because he had no money, he bad-mouthed the state

and publishers and demanded money from those he constantly vilified in his writings. Krúdy barely kept body and soul together on his income from tabloids, and swayed in the wind. When Kosztolányi brought Lord Rothermere's legendary one-thousand-pound gift home from London, a rebellious mood actually flared up in the literary cafés. In the end, Kosztolányi, resignedly and with the gesture of King Solomon, split the prize equally between Móricz and Krúdy; and the writers' hungry and teeth-gnashing fury forced him to step down as president of the Hungarian writers' branch of the Pen Club. He did so cheerfully; after all, he did receive letters of consolation from his readers, from the provinces: from women who felt sorry for him because "he lost his presidential post in the dead of winter."

One just could not make a living from books. And everyone was suspicious of anyone who made a livelihood independently of the dailies and wrote books. Zsigmond Móricz had some kind of household plot with a garden in Leányfalu, but that also aroused suspicion. How could he...? Now Kosztolányi's house lay in ruins in the depths, a pile of moldy debris; this was the most a Hungarian writer could acquire in years past through respectable literary work. The sun was shining; it was spring, and the ruins glittered in the light of the March afternoon like a pile of manure when bright sunlight falls upon it.

Flaubert, in Rouen, had the time, Proust, in Paris, in the cork-lined room, had the leisure to pursue vanished time; he was a man of property. Valéry had the time; he didn't own any property, but he was a civil servant in the Alpine Agency. Gide had an estate in Cuverville. Initiates mentioned these examples with resignation in the literary cafés in Pest. Few of them knew that the living conditions of Western writers were rarely more favorable than those of Hungarian writers. But the Hungarian writer, like the impover-

ished nobleman, was somehow always ashamed to talk about poverty. Writers in the West displayed their dire straits more courageously.

In the end, the writer does have to make a living. Apparently, Shakespeare wasn't ashamed of the fact that he needed money when he wrote dramas, because he had to pay the actors and property men every Saturday. Otherwise, if not enough revenue accumulated from the week's performances of *Hamlet* to pay salaries, he was beaten to a pulp. And so he, too, wrote hurriedly because "he didn't have time;" he interlarded his masterpieces with inserts; he wrote the gravedigger scene and the play-within-the-play into *Hamlet* because he had to draw the rabble and soldiers into the theater. The writer in the West boldly admitted that he wanted to make money from his writings – in every age, Cervantes just like Hemingway. In Hungary, nothing was said about the writer's poverty; officialdom said nothing, publishers said nothing – they had good reason not to – and the writers said nothing. There was a time in the second half of the previous century when the publisher was still a true collaborator who not only mediated between the writer and the public, but assisted with the writing, took part in the creative process directly. In Kosztolányi's lifetime this relationship had already become nebulous.

Not a single Hungarian writer could make a living on the income from his books. Jókai was a prince; he lived extra-territorially, and his books were looked upon as a national institution. Even so, he lived modestly, simply. Even he couldn't make ends meet on the hundred volumes, on the lifework; he needed the newspaper proprietorship, then the Parliamentary membership, the membership on the board of directors. Kosztolányi was neither a member of Parliament nor a member of a board of directors. That is why he wrote feature articles for newspapers every day. A writer just

could not make ends meet in Hungary without contributing to newspapers.

When Kosztolányi finished his writing stint for the day, he jammed his narrow-brimmed knickerbocker hat on his head, wrapped the soft shawl around his neck, clutched under his arm the attaché case bulging with manuscripts, periodicals and books borrowed or intended for lending, and quickly fled from home, away from his flat. He was very tall, and as he hurried along, his gangling figure attracted attention on the streets of Buda. He never looked at anyone; he walked with his head held slightly to one side; a poet's lock of hair fell onto his forehead from under the brim of his hat. He wore a shoestring, brightly colored necktie, and he strode along hurriedly on the cobblestone roadway. This was how he made his appearance before the world, like an actor when the curtain rises and the footlights flash. He had greenish-gray eyes; he knew how to squint affectedly, and he rolled his "r"s when he negotiated with publishers and as the situation called for it. In short, he was a writer from head to toe; he played Kosztolányi like a distinguished actor. (Meanwhile, alone, hence in the wings, he poked fun at himself and at those he performed for, because he knew that there isn't a single eminent person who isn't ridiculous, and that a human impresses others only if self-mockery shines through the mask he wears.) With unsteady, theatrical steps, yes, the steps of a romantic lead, he rushed down the slope of Mikó Street beneath the boughs of the chestnut trees.

He turned in at the gate of the adjacent house, where I was living. He wasn't coming to my place — writers don't like to visit each other. Only the gentle reader or the dilettante thinks that writers enjoy spending time in each other's company. No one is as jealous of, as fiercely curious about a colleague's life, character and attitudes as are writers about the secrets of another writer's inner life; but they don't like

to visit each other, because they know the other writer is just as curious about them. And the possibility that something about them will also be found out is a fearful prospect. The fact that though they are gifted, they haven't been successful and, for this reason, have sworn an oath to alien flags that promise them success. Or the fact that they don't believe in their talents and gloss over this agonizing doubt with their behavior. Kosztolányi had successes, and talent, too, but he didn't like to visit writers. I didn't either. We did occasionally call on each other. We were guests for lunch or dinner at their place, or they at ours. On those occasions, we sat at the dinner table solemnly and with strained formality, but we avoided talk about literature as much as possible. These get-togethers seldom occurred. On one such occasion, he read a poem he had written to my wife. It wasn't a long poem and didn't belong among his more important poetry. For example, another poem called "Dawn Intoxication", in which he prophesied in a feverish vision that one day the houses in which we lived, our neighborhood, everything would be ruins and carrion, was a more pulsating verse. (My wife thanked him for the short poem and put it away as a keepsake.)

When he passed by the front of our house, he entered the porter's lodgings. He sat down, hat on his head, shawl wound around his neck and attaché case under his arm. He sat like this, at times for hours. Everyone in the neighborhood knew about this.

The porter lived with his wife in a room full of kitchen smells. He was a locksmith. His wife was a slender woman from Transdanubia. He belonged to the Hungarian gentry; he was a peasant from the banks of the Tisza, and given to hysterics. He couldn't pass the trade association's examination; he couldn't obtain a plumber's trade license. This caused the childless couple the greatest distress. Kosztolányi comforted them. Periodically he looked up members of the

examination board and presented them with copies of his new book in which he wrote friendly dedications in an attempt to influence them. But the porter kept failing the examination. "Dear sir," he once said to me, his eyes moist, "do something. I promise, if I pass the examination, I'll hang a toilet bowl, a snow-white one, on the street corner on the second floor under your window, so everybody can see it!" When he said this, a baleful light glittered in his eyes, the way the possessed speak, the prophets of Progress, in a trance. But I could do nothing. Kosztolányi was also powerless. The pipe dream remained just that; the porter eventually turned bitter, and when Kosztolányi died, he moved to the provinces with his wife. I never heard anything about him again.

His wife also vanished without a trace. She served as the model for Anna Édes. And the house where the novel takes place was our apartment house. Kosztolányi seldom went past it, coming or going, without dropping in at the porter's. They sat there, the three of them; they didn't eat or drink anything, they just talked. What kind of loneliness, inner banishment was he escaping from at the porter's lodge? He was a writer, a "stylist;" later the pure writer was called a "formalist." It was in this period that "style" began to be disparaged. Every dilettante who feared the achievement of effort, every half-educated scribbler – in literature, theater and publishing – who didn't know there is no such thing as a "new thought," only a new expression, an expression which, if it brims with the stylistic power of the personality, gives new tension to the old thought; every stripling with a fountain pen took a stab at the "stylist." They ordered him to "take a stand." Kosztolányi shrugged his shoulders because he knew there is only a single "espousal" in literature: the effort whose power will turn the Word into Flesh and the Flesh into the Word again even as the Word and Flesh, the world and the spirit create

each other. Possibly, this is what he talked about at the porter's lodge, with the porter and his wife, the model for Anna Édes. Afterwards, he developed a novel from those conversations – the only Hungarian social novel that registered class warfare as it should be, without "social realism," in all its disastrous human reality.

That is where Kosztolányi lived. He set off from there every afternoon for town, but first he dropped in at the porter's. What kind of propensity, curiosity took this pure writer, this *homo aestheticus* into the basement flat? He was a poet, he wrote love poems to the Hungarian language, to Hungary. Every day he presented Hungary with the gift of a tasteful blend of words, with a nuance of expression, with a biting or touching remark. He wasn't the member of any Party. When he wrote he did not count on the Classless Society that would one day understand him. He didn't believe in the People. He just wrote. And he really felt at home only in the porter's flat.

8

This flat on the ground floor, in the basement, remained undamaged in the bombed-out apartment house. During the war, a different porter lived in it: Lajos Balázs, who was a typesetter at the state printing office. He was the best kind of human being – in the sense of humane and social – that I knew in Hungary. During the siege, without being asked, he carried the belongings of absent occupants down to his basement flat – our clothes and bedding, too – and took care of these meager belongings to the very last day. He stood guard over the odds and ends with the devoted loyalty of a soldier defending a ragged, bullet-torn flag in a stronghold under siege. For this apartment house was the last building in Buda, where, in

the cellar and around the house, the Germans were still fighting in February 1945. When the Russians ended this battle, too, the war was over in Budapest.

Balázs lost his life on the last day when he dashed out of the house to help a wounded woman on the corner of the Vérmező. He died on the spot, on the street corner; one of the last bullets fired in Budapest pierced his chest. There was no doctor nearby, so he bled to death on the street. His wife buried him in the Vérmező, in the only way it was possible to bury anyone in those days: a twenty-centimeter layer of muddy earth covered the dead man. The day I first walked up to Castle Hill to locate another deceased acquaintance, Balázs's widow invited me to look at the place in the Vérmező where her husband was so hastily buried. Earlier, she conscientiously showed me the bale in the cellar corner in which her husband had packed our things. She spoke about the circumstances surrounding his death without any weeping or wailing. She couldn't cry, just as many forget to cry when it comes to light that life has no meaning at all. Humans weep and wail only while they believe life has some kind of meaning. There are some who die believing this. It is these who find salvation; this is what religion teaches.

Mrs. Balázs didn't cry. "There's no use shedding tears over what is fated," Theseus says. Mrs. Balázs never read the Greeks; she simply didn't understand why her husband, whom she "worshiped," died – this is how she put it shyly, musingly, more as if to herself – why he died on the last day of the war when dying was no longer a patriotic duty. She stood silently before the hastily dug grave. I didn't say anything either; I couldn't come up with the *mot juste*: that certain word that shows reality in a picture, the word that discloses everything the Imagists dream of. There are situations when there are no words suitable for a reply. And she didn't expect any kind of answer or explanation. She stood for a long time in front of the slat stuck into the

ground in place of a gravestone. Those who buried him wrote her husband's name and the date he fell in the Second World War on brown wrapping paper: "Lajos Balázs, typesetter, he lived 38 years." There was nothing for us to say to each other; so we stood around for a while in front of the makeshift grave. I don't know what Mrs. Balázs was thinking. I was thinking that maybe her husband was a hero. (But, I remember, I thought this morosely, since at the time – and even more so later – every word like "Homeland" or "Hero" or "Sacrifice" had turned banal and bitter in my consciousness.) Still, it is possible that Balázs was a hero. There are many kinds of heroes.

Euripides, for instance, maintained – I didn't think of this at the time when I was standing before the twenty-centimeter-deep grave; it comes to me now as I write about "heroes" twenty-five years later – Euripides maintained that according to the Greeks' general tastes, Andromache was a heroine, because she let herself be dragged off to a "Greek bed" and meanwhile suffered having the Achaeans fling her child against a wall. True, she couldn't do anything about it, but still, what was heroic about this? Human evaluation is strange. There is a notion which claims that a hero is someone who does only what is in accord with his character.

For example, there was the baker in our neighborhood, at Zerge Stairs and the corner of Attila Street. True to his trade, he baked bread for the military in his ground-floor flat. He wasn't a Nazi, but he feared the Communists, and so when he had to declare his position, he joined some "wondrous stag" group. He knew doing so would subject him to surveillance and get him into trouble when the time of identity check arrived. Yet, when many left Budapest because the bridges over the Danube were blown up and artillery rumbled in Újpest, this baker did not go anywhere; he stayed in his shop in Buda. Apprentice bakers had

been conscripted, or they had fled. What will a baker do at the end of the Second World War when he realizes that for him the war was lost? He pondered the matter and, like Montaigne, made his decision: he stayed in his shop and continued to ply his trade.

This was what he did. When the Russians were approaching Castle Hill and Krisztinaváros around Christmas, this Hungarian baker of Swabian descent stayed in his place with his wife and baked bread. He had flour and fuel; there were still some potatoes and salt in his shop. Fighting was going on in Tabán, some five hundred meters farther on. In the morning, the baker heated the oven, untied the flour sack, kneaded dough, pushed the brown army dough into the oven with his long-handled paddle and baked bread from morning to night. During the last week, he also worked at night.

When it grew dark and the Ratas stopped bombing for a few hours, people from the neighborhood cautiously crawled out of the cellars of the adjoining houses with their water jugs and crept away to the courtyard of one of the tenements on Attila Street, where a fountain from prehistoric times remained as a monument, and they drew water from it, because the water system was no longer functioning. Then, before crawling back to their basement caves, they went over to the bakery and bought a loaf of baked bread. The baker gave everyone bread for paper money at the official current price, practically free. But he asked every purchaser for a bread card in February 1945, at the end of the Second World War in Buda! He carefully cut a coupon from it with scissors and put it away.

On the last morning, when the Germans and Hungarians had moved on and given Buda up, the baker took off his white work apron, extinguished the fire in the oven, sat down beside the kneading trough, leaned the long-handled paddle with which he pushed the loaves into the oven against the wall, rolled a ciga-

rette and lighted up. He waited for the Russians thus. They arrived at noon and promptly hauled him away, because a zealot living in the neighborhood denounced him as a war criminal. This notion was easily extended, and in the early days after the war's end, large numbers of people who survived were called war criminals. The finger-pointing lasted for years; the baker had time in Yekaterinburg, where he was taken from his shop, to reflect on whether he was really guilty or not. It is not easy to determine the truth in the baker's case. Nor in the cases of the writers, kidney surgeons and shoe-top stitchers who survived a lost war. Possibly everyone is guilty, the entire human race. For this reason, it is best to win, because the victor gains a statue. The one who loses is hanged or hauled off to Yekaterinburg.

Aladár Schöpflin – he also lived in the vicinity of the rubbish pile where my home had been not so long ago – definitely did not take part in the war. More bricks remained of his home than ours, but he and his family were also driven away by the turbulence of the war. Later, during my roll call, I located Schöpflin in an inner-city flat. He had suffered a stroke; he spoke with a stammer but was able to move one of his hands. So he held a book with it and read. Struck by apoplexy, he read, just as the baker baked to the last moment; he read because reading was his profession. His mind remained unimpaired, and *Don Quixote*, he said, was the most beautiful of all the books he had read in his life. This was understandable, because Schöpflin – yes, I can now clearly make out the house in the depths where he lived – did himself seem like a Don Quixote who had become a school commissioner. When he acknowledged that Don Quixote was his ideal, he smiled humbly, uneasily, the way persons smile whom some physical defect has excluded from the society of the healthy – this is why they are arrogant but feel ashamed, too.

Schöpflin was also a member of the middle class; he belonged to this little middle-class world in Buda that now lay shattered. He trod like a soldier, back straight; he kept his bristly hair cut short and sat in the Philadelphia Café as if he were in an office reading documents. He sat alone with a stern bearing and drank a small glass of plum brandy. I always rejoiced at seeing him. He read in the café, too, and seldom spoke; instead, he just mumbled under his breath. He knew that in life's dreadful chaos there is no other escape than the well-crafted sentence: everything else is merely perjury or humbug. His profession was to write book reviews for periodicals. He pondered these reviews devoutly and then wrote with the conscientious absorption of a judge from an ancient world rendering a vitally important decision. But first he read the books he was writing about. Later, this point of view and practice changed; blackguards seized pens and, under the pretext of criticism, disposed of lifeworks with flitting, flippant fragmentary sentences. Perhaps Schöpflin was a hero, too, because he was faithful to his profession and to his convictions.

The basement of our apartment house wasn't damaged, and the workshop of Mr. Kovács, the devout carpenter, remained intact in the cellar at the front of the building facing Mikó Street. He and his family vanished in the chaos of the siege, never to reappear. Perhaps they are still living only in that droll little book I wrote in my heedless youthful years about Mikó Street, Krisztinaváros, my snappish Puli, named Csutora, and all the lunatics and eccentrics who at one time lived down there in the depths in those demolished houses, in that family myth now collapsed into rubble. This was my world, and this was my own myth, and so I wrote about it. Proust wrote about French aristocrats and upper-middle-class snobs. I wrote about Mr. Kovács, and I now looked around to see if I had left anyone out.

I had forgotten to include the corner pharmacist and his wife in that book, maybe out of tact or maybe only out of cowardice, because Kosztolányi, who read the book and knew the two and four-legged characters in the little episode, advised me after its publication that it might be a good idea for me to repair to the provinces for a while, because news about the book was making the rounds of the neighborhood residents – they didn't read it, they just heard about it – and it wasn't out of question that one day one of the novel's heroes will lie in wait and stab me in the back with a pointed file. Possibly, I was afraid to write about the pharmacist because the residents in the Krisztina district were a laconic but logical sort, and I had reason to fear that if I wrote about him, the pharmacist would exact his revenge by mixing a laxative into the powders for vascular spasms that I sometimes bought from him.

I didn't write about the pharmacist, and I was now glad to see that the pharmacy itself had not been damaged in the infernal, brutal chaos of the siege. It stood on the opposite corner, facing the Vérmező. Toward the end of the war, all kinds of things were available in his pharmacy – even veal and warm wool stockings – but hardly any medicine, because soldiers and profiteers bought up most of the medicinal herbs and concoctions. The pharmacist's wife was a maniacal dog-lover, and she suffered a grievous loss at the end of the Second World War: her dog died of old age in bed among pillows. Rusnya [Ugly], was a fat old pug, and the pharmacist's wife mourned him with undiminished grief. Whenever I went into the pharmacy to buy powders for the vascular spasms, or veal or warm underwear, the woman, seated at the cashier's desk, always pointed out to me that next to the desk stood in a silver frame her favorite photograph of the dear departed. "Please look," she said, her tears flowing, "I always see his eyes. If I wake up at night, I see his eyes

looking at me from the great beyond. But he looks as if he were still with us. He passed away." And she wept. She never said the dog died, she always sighed: "He passed away."

Her suffering was genuine. Her outlook wasn't social; indeed, possibly, given the historical crisis we were living in then, she seemed unfeeling. At the time, empires were collapsing, humans were suffering and dying amid horrible torment, cities and civilizations were being eradicated. Everyone everywhere mourned for a loved one, a husband, a son, a father, a sweetheart. But in Krisztinaváros, the pharmacist's wife mourned over her dog.

Now, when the pharmacy that survived could be seen – only its store section remained – and no sign of the pharmacy couple, like the dog, was left – all those who had lost unutterably more and things more precious would with justifiable indignation demand that stones be cast at the memory of a person who could grieve for a dog when humanity was suffering. But it is extremely difficult to pass judgment justly over human beings. Later, I read that in the days when the Germans marched into Paris and the people of the French capital began their exodus – thousands flooded the national highways in flight from the Germans – Léautaud, the distinguished French critic, took to the road with two dozen Parisian dogs in the company of his old girlfriend; he was saving them from the Germans, because he feared the Nazis would harm them. Was Léautaud inhuman? He lived among dogs and cats because he did not trust human beings. (Is it possible to trust humans? Is the *pathei mathos* true, that suffering ennobles us? Or is it only happiness that instructs us? Does pain simply drive us mad or abet cruelty? I don't know.) Léautaud was a friend of literature and an animal lover among his animals under conditions resembling a rubbish pile, but sometimes special flames shot up from this rubbish-pile environ-

ment. This maniacal little Frenchman, for example, could, amid the world conflagration, take an interest in literature and animals with identical intimacy. Without lunacy there is no intellectual energy. Nor is it possible to love and mourn without madness. And in the middle of a world war, it almost makes no difference whom or what we love or mourn.

The pharmacist's wife certainly went too far when she mourned over her dog. But in the frightful loneliness of life, humans don't choose rationally when they must love, or hate. Now I looked around from the height of the Bastion and saw people among the ruins who hadn't learned a thing from suffering. I hadn't learned anything either, except possibly caution when passing judgment on the pharmacist's wife, on others, on my own self.

A statue at the base of the Granite Stairs survived. Opposite Kosztolányi's house, the bust of a Hungarian epic poet from the past century, Károly P. Szakmáry, stood on a pedestal. In the vicinity – Castle Hill and Krisztinaváros – it was the only undamaged monument among mostly inferior statues still standing. Not a soul living in the neighborhood knew who this Szakmáry was, what he wrote, and why he was commemorated with a statue. I didn't know either. I once looked him up in a lexicon, and now I faintly remembered he wrote a verse tale titled *Etelka*. Probably by now it is hard to find this work on the dusty shelves of libraries. But in this world situation, it was an encouraging sight, assurance that literature is more powerful than history, though neither has any meaning. The epic poem outlasts everything: *Etelka*, like the *Odyssey* or the *Cid*, is immortal.

Near the statue still stood the house where a countess lived who occasionally published tales under the pseudonym "Szikra" [Sparkle]. I never read this neighbor's works, though everyone in the Krisztina District spoke appreciatively about what a brave soul

she was; she was a countess, and still she wrote. The native inhabitants of Krisztinaváros mentioned such matters, nodding gravely; I doubt very many of them read, but surprisingly large numbers of individuals wrote here, because it was a literary neighborhood.

What else was there? The chestnut trees that formed a line in front of our place with their story-high foliage were destroyed in the war. The Rata-bombs and cannon shells tore off their branches as if forces more horrible than all windstorms together had engaged the thick-trunked chestnut trees in battle. They could be seen from the height, and they were, perhaps, the only things among the sights below that stirred any emotion in the observer, namely myself. They were lovely, luxuriant trees; in the spring they pinned on their snow-white and pink candles, in the summer their dark-green leafage completely shaded the window of the room where I resided and lived. There was a decade when this street, neighborhood, people and leafy chestnut trees had substance and meaning for me. There was something profound, complete and lively in this part of the street. The warm breath of youthful years, manhood, intrigue and love, ambition, disillusionment and contentment infused the dense leaves. But of this nothing remained.

It would now seem appropriate for me to set the scene engagingly in the closing lines of this section. Thus: the writer has returned to the scene of the Deed (what was the Deed? Life, the fact that I was alive; somehow this is always unforgivable); he looked down from the height at the ruins where one phase of his life and his vain and deranged literary activity occurred, and decided that he personally was only a caricature in this majestically alms-bag-like, pseudo-bourgeois setting in Buda. And he is already moving on; he is leaving the ruins of home for another world in ruins, where perhaps there are some illusions, but it is cer-

tain that there is no longer a "home" for him there either.

It is possible that the staging, the setting – the writer is bidding farewell to a past fallen into ruin – is deplorably romantic. What I wrote about the "farewell" was romantic, but there was also reality in it all, because there actually was such a March day and "farewell." And this is entirely a device and *mache*, as "literature" always is when the writer cannot keep his mouth shut and says as much as a single word exceeding the facts. The writer who in the midst of destruction and misery, which is the general human condition in peace and war, exculpates himself and protests that he "sincerely feels" what he is writing about forgets the law of his profession, according to which no such thing as "sincere" literature exists. In literature, as in life, only silence is "sincere." As soon as someone starts speaking to the public, he is no longer "sincere," but a writer, or an actor, hence a human being wriggling his hips.

"The written word," the "belles-lettres" are always a bit of clownery; the painted soul, daubed white and red with colorful words, brings to mind the clown with such a dappled mug who speaks of funny and mischievous things in the circus ring. At the end of a world war and – presumably – before new wars, the writer who has spoken of matters other than statistical data cannot be "sincere." But there is no escape for the writer, because he cannot remain "silent." He has to speak from the world's rubbish pile, he still has to spout off from the mass grave. The hope that a shock more powerful than anything else will bring to writers (and the human race) the day when they can be genuinely "sincere," because they already are only writing and mumbling with root words – that is a vain hope. Even so, the writer can do nothing more than daub paint on his soul and, with nice root words, tell "everything." And the "theme" that he speaks about in every

age, on every rubbish pile is always the same one: the *Nekyia*, or the journey in the world of the dead and, the Adventure, after the *Iliad* – the *Nostos*, the return Home.

The "journey to the dead" took place, I believe, in these pages. The "return Home" cannot, because I no longer have a home. (It is a question whether I ever really had one. Or was everything that perished in the flimsy setting a caricature?) After all that took place, to what extent did the Homeland remain home for others, the ten million who speak Hungarian? And can one write about this "sincerely"?

One cannot "write sincerely" about anything. In any event, for the sake of roundness and unity of mood, I shall, nevertheless, write down what I saw along the way when I left the scene of the Deed and went back to the city.

9

I crossed Dísz Square, which was now as empty and desolate as Pompeii in winter after the tourists have departed. Not a trace remained of the splendor of the Royal Palace, and what still stood stirred bad memories in the stroller. The palace was as tastelessly massive a structure as most royal palaces in Europe are, and now, in ruins, it wouldn't have appealed even to Gandhi, because its outlines, proportions, everything about it was extravagant, pompous and dreary. The palace showed it had been built in a grand style but not as a labor of love. Franz Josef, the monarch who first lived in it, remained in the general consciousness of history as someone who "stepped nimbly" and then inquired about "what the crop was like." According to common knowledge, the Regent, who was aide-de-camp to Franz Josef before he himself moved into

the Royal Palace, "chatted affably" with visitors and then went about "ruling" the nation.

Now, when nothing remained of all this except the ruined palace, the waxworks of this kingless kingdom appeared to me faintly for a moment. Visible behind the wrought-iron gate was the apparition of the Regent in an admiral's uniform mounted on a white horse. And then the eminent priests, barons, statesmen in gala attire and the national hierarchy of personnel dressed in various, most often tasteful uniforms: ministers, lord lieutenants, fire chiefs, on down to stationmasters. (Why, I thought as I was standing before the wrought-iron gate of the ruined palace – why was it that I always experienced a crawly aversion and grumpy antipathy whenever some troublesome official business forced me to ring the doorbell at the gate of a Hungarian embassy in a foreign land between the two world wars, through two decades abroad, during my years of vagabondage? Why?... After all, everyone received me politely. And they always gave me the help I needed at the time: "Of course for you, Mr. Editor, with special dispatch." Yes, they took care of matters, but that condescending pseudo-courtesy with which the doorman, the clerk and the ambassador welcomed me – as if everybody wearing a lustral sleeve protector was an integral part of Saint Stephen's cope – nauseated me, and I was glad when I was outside on the street again... Why?)

The Regent Miklós Horthy resided in the palace; he didn't "live" in it, he "resided" in it, because the neo-baroque gentry etiquette that replaced the Spanish etiquette of Franz Josef insisted upon such finely shaded distinctions. And he "ruled" from the palace – not "governed" but "ruled." He was always affable. Down below and everywhere in the neighborhood, great personages stood around in the show windows of offices with a demeanor commanding respect, indeed reverential recognition, like the local saints at the festi-

val in Máriapócs carved out of wood and painted in many colors at which the devout crowd marveled agape. Behind the Regent, barons, keepers of the crown, prelates, ministers and lord lieutenants rallied the second fighting-line of the social order built upon the remnants of the half-feudal system of large landed estates: county officials, notaries, gendarmes, station-masters and track watchmen – everyone who hoped to obtain molasses to fatten piglets, or a railroad car during the watermelon season or the corn harvest, or manorial fuel in winter in the nick of time from the big landowners in the region. And this dependency, this indigence, this complicated, unrelenting and narrow-minded and ever more entangled coalition of interests cast its net over all society. This was the real power structure of the nation. Not only the cotter and the day laborer, whose ephemeral life depended on the benevolence of the landowner or the estate's steward or the overseer, blinked with fear at the landowner with more than a thousand acres; so did the local notary, who indulged in the fancy that the landowner's steward would place the notary's sometimes half-witted, sometimes highly gifted but always destitute kid in patched trousers in the high school of the neighboring town without having to pay tuition. The gendarme who hoped to get free feed for his stock from the estate – everyone knew that his personal good fortune and the future of his dependents, every vital interest depended lock, stock and barrel at least as much on the landowner as on the power of the state.

When these lords came to Pest from the village to "take the cure," or to "politicize," or to "enjoy a social life," some of them lived in these streets on Castle Hill. The houses, now skeletons, were familiar to them. Their friends and close or distant acquaintances lived in most of them: some were aristocrats who at this time already felt obliged to invite writers and artists to their drawing rooms and dining halls. High-ranked

civil servants and so-called "decent" individuals fond of seclusion, the atmosphere of old homes and pieces of fine furniture lived in the Austrian-style baroque houses. This self-contained section of the city already felt at this time – between the two world wars – the duty to entertain "intellectual persons" as guests from time to time.

By then, however, only a few "true aristocrats" existed in Hungary. The few families – who God knows on what basis of classification and selectivity – considered themselves "aristocrats" at this time had thrown open their drawing rooms to the so-called "more renowned" of middle-class society. And this social set was not the worst one in Hungary; it was certainly different from the parvenu boors who had feathered their nests, the "good old boy" oligarchy of the prime minister's councilors. After the destruction of the monarchy, this society urgently and grotesquely concocted an adulterated hierarchy and etiquette, but missing from this concoction was not only the rigid sense of the black and gold rank and proportion of Spanish etiquette; it also lacked that tact, moderation and sense of duty and taste that to some degree pervaded the drawing room, bureaucracy, private citizenry and every social institution at the time of Franz Josef. Already this was merely an *ersatz*-hierarchy and a *mini*-etiquette – artificial, hence lamentable and laughable. (But is it possible to pass judgment on a society that foreign powers exploited and mauled for centuries? The Turks, the Austrians, then yesterday the imperialistic Nazi Teutons and today the imperialistic Slavs – always foreign armies in the country and foreign will in public life, always the constraint of compromise to come to terms with foreign forces, and thus the inevitable corruption. And Trianon in between, the millions of humans torn from the nation's body. The tragedy of Hungarian society can not be explained by inner structural shortcomings.

This was a profoundly tragic fate, and rare was the time when the nation could recover, in its history, from its destiny of standing entirely alone, its temperament, its own moral reserves. This was how I seethed – not then on Dísz Square but later, and not just once.)

But now I was strolling here, on the Bastion. Let us cast a glance behind us and one ahead of us... The members of the “ruling class” resided here, here and in some old houses in the Inner City. (In reality, they had not ruled for a long time; they just gave themselves airs.) For decades, every day at noon, the honorable undersecretaries of state, their excellencies the ministers and the generals in accoridian trousers with red-colored stripes took a stroll under the leafy saplings of the old promenade. All of them were friendly, jovial. Everyone greeted the other Honorable and Excellent one courteously. Perhaps there were a few more generals than were absolutely necessary; in Franz Josef’s time, for instance, a lieutenant general was a rarity, but in Horthy’s army this high-ranked military dignitary was found by the thousands. Among the promenaders, a fat old duchess in riding clothes she had grown out of also passed by, and everyone bowed deeply to the grandiose woman, those also who didn’t know her personally. But it was mostly acquaintances who strolled and sunned themselves here every noon: a large family, kinsfolk, social groups, family members held together by the Hungarian class compact sealed with blood.

These few streets – around the Royal Palace, Prime Ministry and high state offices – they were the *piano nobile* of Hungary’s social structure. Now, when nothing of this illustrious tier remained any longer, names and faces came into my mind. Through the missing casements of familiar little palaces belonging to the fortress, I could see into the rooms where once, at a time before history, the favored of Hungarian society lived. The atmosphere of snobbishness flowed from the

rooms like mustiness from a badly aired clothes closet. Still, this snobbishness in the drawing rooms – behold, here lived the prince who owned more than two hundred thousand acres, the countess who collected jade elephants as hobby, the baron who wanted to be a writer at all costs and did not understand why this well-intentioned venture did not succeed – this preposterous snobbishness also represented a demand, and it was an enzyme. I walked about the Bastion in the March sunshine, I looked into some of the familiar rooms, and I thought that these Hungarian upper ten thousand were no worse than the privileged castes in other countries. They were no worse than the French or English upper ten thousand were in the twentieth century; they were just more absent-minded – they forgot to pay taxes.

10

... And this was the crux of the problem, for the inhabitants of Castle Hill in Buda and then the nation's wealthy living elsewhere, these cultured ladies and gentlemen with the refined tastes, forgot to pay their taxes. Oh, they paid something, but not as really and truly as in the West and only for appearance's sake. For a while, they tried to justify themselves by holding that their ancestors – sometime long ago, before general compulsory military conscription – paid by donating their blood in defense of the homeland. This was true up to the Battle of Mohács. But in 1848 – there were also some honorable exceptions then – the aristocrats were no longer shedding their blood; the foot soldier, the common people were doing that. The aristocrats survived that cataclysm unscathed, and in their absent-mindedness they forgot about what the privileged in France, England and then America had already been compelled to accept with

gnashing teeth in this century: they did not pay the progressive real inheritance tax (which, if they paid, would send their heirs packing within the lifetime of two generations); they did not pay the full income tax (which, if they paid, would, at least in principle, equalize the unseemly contrasts between grand and modest ways of life); and, most of all, they did not pay progressive real wages. At dawn the young herdsman drove the cattle to pasture, while the landowner listened contentedly to him singing full-throatedly. This is what the boy sang: "My pay is three forints twenty pennies / a young herdsman lives on that." But oddly enough, the ne'er-do-well did not make ends meet; instead, he went to America, to the mines. And, to all appearances, everything in Hungary stayed as if the ruling and ostentatious social class had the God-given right to forget their duty to pay taxes, a duty that had become a reality by law not only in the distant West but also in neighboring Austria and Czechoslovakia. They did not pay in full the taxes which the wealthy of Western societies – always groaning, sometimes complying with the laws of peaceful evolution, sometimes as a consequence of revolutionary coercion – were already paying nearly everywhere else. They did not pay this obligatory philanthropic charge, and the lords who lived in these houses sat out first the Arrow Cross and then the "distribution," – but they did not pay real taxes.

They didn't want to acquiesce because there was no "middle-of-the road" available; it was either real taxation, or anarchy and Bolshevism. For instance, in this beautiful house now in ruins – the owner, the bearer of a historical name, was an extraordinarily cultured and courtly man; he collected paintings of the French impressionists and the tusks of the Central-African rhinoceros – this owner knew precisely that "something ought to be done," and, with a rare tusk in his hand, he often expounded his modern

social views in the presence of visitors from other classes. But, in the end, he didn't pay his taxes, because the members of his own class, the landowning lords, then the wealthy plutocrats and governmental authorities would lock him up in a madhouse if he began paying full taxes on his own initiative. He also realized that this role of a thousand years was over, and so when the Russian troops appeared in the country, he didn't start hobnobbing and dickering with the Communists because he had read Chateaubriand – he had a beautiful library, I remember the French classicists who lined its shelves – and learned that “the power that degrades itself and begins to bargain with its enemies never receives mercy from them in the end.” The better elements of this historical class tried to bear their loss gracefully; at least they did not stand with hat in hand, soliciting some leftover trifle from those who had done them out of everything they owned.

This social class resided here and perished politely and elegantly – in any case, with a sense of greater dignity than those boors who sniffed the possibility of a role in the system which proclaimed that its duty was to eradicate the function of the bourgeoisie. The aristocrats mounted the scaffold sullenly – most often only in the figurative sense, because it is not only counts but also Communists who are inclined to snobishness, and they, with surprising indifference, allowed the aristocrats who didn't ask for a handout after the “distribution” to die out. Few of them went to the West; even fewer begged for a role from those who had stripped them of their position. In the French Revolution, at the time of the Terror, when Sanson, the executioner, beheaded counts and marquesses by the dozens every day on the scaffold in the Place de Gréve, the condemned were seated on small benches on the high platform of the scaffold with hands tied behind their backs, awaiting their turn. It was recorded that

the pressing mob, the bloodthirsty wenches below the high platform urged the aristocratic women awaiting their turn to throw down to them their lovely shoes, for, after all, they wouldn't have any need for footwear in a few seconds, and that the aristocratic ladies, who could not pull off their shoes with their bound hands, flicked them off their feet one after the other with deft movements of their sharp-toed shoes and then kicked them off the platform into the hands of the beggars. One can face loss this way, too. It doesn't have much meaning, but at any rate, it is more inviting, for example, than having someone accept a literary prize from those who had previously "beheaded" him by divesting him of literature's sole significance and requisite: the free expression of his thoughts, the freedom to write.

Here had lived the countess who was the wife of an immensely rich French jeweler; not much remained of their imposing house, only its façade stood undamaged. After the Second World War, pessimists endowed with imaginative power likened Europe to such a ruined house with an unscathed façade. They asserted that Europe is a house in ruins whose façade is invariably lofty and engaging, but anyone who enters its portal with intellectual and moral concerns finds nothing more than grimy debris.

Truly, nothing more remained of the countess's house on Dísz Square than its façade. Among the rooms showed the Versailles wall covering in the dining room, the *boiserie* and also a rubble-covered spinet, whose strings bomb blasts had snapped off. In 1942, the countess flew from here to America because "they heat better there" (and she was absolutely right about this; in America they did heat better, in 1942, than in Budapest). She took her golf clubs along and a chambermaid, a peasant girl from the Alföld; this, too, was a proper decision, well-thought through historically, because without the golf clubs one is used to one can't

play golf well, and the chambermaid was already familiar with certain dressing and grooming habits of the countess, and it would have been a pity to exchange her for a Negro girl in America. So she flew away with golf clubs in her hand. Wise old Colette, toward the end of her life, said in one of her writings: "Either love or cohabitation." Cohabitation with a human being is difficult; cohabitation with a country is very much more difficult. Possibly, the countess was in love with Hungary and feared cohabitation. Is this why she flew away? One cannot know, because she did not have time to confess this; after all, she died soon after in America.

A friend of hers, another countess, did not fly away. The painter who was hopelessly in love with this countess – he lived there on the other side of the Vérmező, but now a dungheap of machines and animals on the carrion meadowland hid the window of his studio from view – watched in vain for her favors with the glowing devotion of a Saint Francis or a Saint John of the Cross and finally became so embittered that he fell ill with lung cancer. When the medical diagnosis left no doubt, the countess – *noblesse oblige* – called on her dying lover in the studio one afternoon. I am writing this down because everyone who had something to do with this melodrama has passed away by now – the countess died, and naturally, shortly after the visit, the painter also died, because being a gentleman, he didn't like to receive a gift without reciprocating immediately.

11

*"...This used to be the bridge. You rode out here
at full moon.
Halfway across the hansom cab put on the
brakes.*

porary in a state of "historical readiness;" sometimes we learn that something is irrevocably over while we're in pajamas or shaving. The little bald man was markedly pale, but only now did I see that his face was chalk white.

"Schuschnigg has resigned," he added, and hacked.

For a time he stood in the doorway, confusedly, as if he were ashamed of himself for some reason. He gazed at the floor, at the toes of his shoes, puzzled. Then he shrugged his shoulders and left, closing the door quietly behind him. I remained alone, and – I sometimes thought about this later – I, too, felt, faintly and confusedly, that I was ashamed of myself for some reason. One is always ashamed when one finds out he is not a hero but a dupe: a dupe of history.

That day, I arrived home late in the evening. It was a starry, warm, early spring night. The Chain Bridge was still standing then. When I drove across it toward two in the morning, the glaringly floodlit windows of the prime minister's mansion shined up high. At other times, only on occasions of official proceedings was the beautiful edifice illuminated in this way. From the bridge this spectacle struck me as if on this day, too, the lights of a special celebration were shining on high. When I reached the garage in Buda, three dust-covered cars bearing Austrian registration plates were standing in a row before the gate. Women and children were taking their time getting out of the cars. A man was bickering with the garage owner.

"It doesn't need washing," he said hoarsely. "We are moving on in the morning."

They probably have not stopped "moving on" to this day. I waited for the refugees to drive into the garage. I was the last one in after them. Then I did not yet know that I, too, had got into the single file that the fleeing Austrian family was heading. It took me

ten years to become aware of this with all its consequences.

I went home and turned in. I slept soundly. Much transpired while I was asleep. Ten years later I read in Churchill's memoirs that on this very night English Prime Minister Chamberlain and his wife entertained German Foreign Minister Ribbentrop and his wife as guests at 10 Downing Street in London. After dinner – during which Ribbentrop was in singularly good humor and chatted in an easy manner with his table companions – Chamberlain was handed a telegram. In this telegram the German government reported that German armed forces had crossed the Austrian border.

In the morning I read the papers, which gave news of Schuschnigg's resignation and "Plebiscite Postponed" in large headlines. The radio station in Vienna was off the air; local and foreign announcers, uninformed and alarmed, cleared their throats hoarsely. Later, the Vienna radio began broadcasting music, playing snappy military marches and merry Schubert melodies alternately. I went to the garage. The Austrian refugees had already "moved on," but other dust-covered cars with Vienna and Graz registrations stood at the entrance. I drove to the university library and took out a book available only there and then went to Margaret Island to play some tennis. The coach was an older man. He didn't like to run, and so he served the balls very carefully, as if the main point of tennis was for players not to tax their hearts needlessly. "Please don't run," he shouted from the other side of the net, from the edge of the court. I'll place the ball so you won't have to do any running." This therapeutic tennis went on for an hour. Then I drove to the swimming pool and took a hot shower. The massager, Emil (this was only his "stage name," as his fellow massager said; he was actually named Károly), gave me a vigorous rubdown. I swam several hundred meters, and,

my spirit relaxed and body refreshed, I set off for home, where "work" awaited me. Thus went the daily ceremony attending a prospering literary career. (We did live this genteelly. I did live this genteelly.) By now all this glimmers through the murkiness of the imperfect tense, and for this reason, it would be proper for me to sprinkle ashes on my head and pound my chest for not having "cast" myself on the social barricades of the times, for not wearing threadbare and patched clothes and going hungry. In fact, I played tennis and lived damned well. I am, however, incapable of this form of repentant self-reproach. What I regret is that I did not live even more gaily and comfortably while I still had the means of doing so. For this was nothing more than a life of keeping up appearances, not just my life but the life of the entire Hungarian middle class. Actually, there wasn't a single month of my life when I didn't have to worry about a hundred pengős, but what I needed the hundred pengős for was another matter: the payment of an installment on the car or the occasional support of an ardent woman reader, because this was also a part of the prospering literary career, which really wasn't prospering.

I started out for home, but first I listened to the latest news on the radio at the entrance to the swimming pool. An orotund male voice – with the same scatter-brained jabbering that radio listeners are informed about sports events – reported to the world that German forces had already reached Vienna and that the Führer was on the way to the land of his birth. Then music again followed. This musicalized history which served notice via waves of ether accompanied by reverberations of swaying waltzes and snappy marches that a country had temporarily ceased to exist as an historical idea, and a city had perished, over hundreds of thousands of human beings filled with a sense of mass doom – this history became a routine matter in the decades to come. It is likely that when Carthage fell or

Belisarius marched against Rome, no music was as yet played in those cities. But Vienna now played music; the bumm-bumm-bumm of German military music blared from the radio, and the loudspeaker of history screeched to the world, accompanied by melodies of rousing and snappy marches, that Adolf Hitler had entered the capital of the Habsburgs at the head of his troops, standing and waving from a large automobile, his arm thrust upward in that grotesque Caesar-like salute.

Before going home so that the "dear master" could – dutifully – complete the daily stint for a novel or a newspaper article, I drove up to Castle Hill and walked the length of the Bastion's promenade. As on all days at noon, the Bastion was crowded with habitual visitors, with dignified and gracious strollers. They walked back and forth on the promenade, lined by chestnut and plantain trees, with the mechanical ceremoniousness displayed by the figures of a droll clockwork. On this early spring day, an almond tree had burst into bloom along the promenade of the city's old historical section in front of the graceful mansions. While walking, I looked at this tree closely, with an intentness proper to world events, since it is not only what radios screech that constitutes a world event. However, otherwise nothing had changed on the Bastion's promenade since yesterday. Acquaintances greeted each other with grave courtesy; the dogs of counts and barons romped under the chestnut trees just breaking into leaf. In the limpid light, brightly polished fine furniture was visible through the open windows of the mansions.

Friendly hands waved and extended greetings. The pensioners of Buda's precincts, Krisztinaváros, Víziváros and Naphegy, undersecretaries of state, ministers of state, and generals in trousers with colored stripes were taking the air and sunning themselves just as calmly on this day as on every day before.

Everyone knew everyone else in the vicinity, if not personally, then by hearsay and sight. A short, bespectacled man, wearing a Polish fur coat with braids and a Tyrolese hat with a chamois tuft, approached, acknowledging greetings absent-mindedly; one could see he was worried and absorbed in other matters. In his look and deportment there was always a kind of perplexed and abstracted pseudogravity, and a shyness appeared in his demeanor, in his schoolmasterish, affectedly grave mien. He was a geographer, politician, enthusiastic scoutmaster, prime minister and scion of an ancient Transylvanian family. His hands clasped behind his back, he trudged with quick, short steps on the Bastion's promenade. Presumably, during his walk he was thinking, as he was getting ready for his duties, that behind the Buda hills, some hundreds of kilometers beyond them, Hitler was now entering Vienna in pomp. And since he was not only a prime minister but also a geographer and cartographer, he was probably also thinking that maps will now also have to be redrawn, not just Austria's but other maps as well. This was why he looked directly ahead so care-laden and returned greetings only offhandedly. And since humans know destiny not only through the intellect but through the viscera, perhaps he already suspected dimly and gloomily that the day was not too distant when he specifically – the geographer, boy scout and prime minister – as a consequence of what occurred on this day, would, during the night of an equally lovely early spring day, blow out his brains because Hitler's troops violated Hungary's sovereignty by crossing Hungary on the way to Yugoslavia. But that night still loomed in the distance. Strollers coming from the opposite direction greeted the bespectacled and slightly built man politely and casually, as if everything were the same as yesterday and the preceding decades.

In the Royal Palace at this hour, as on other

days, the Regent was receiving petitioners and "ruling" the country. And the country, what was it doing on this day? And the caricature that I was (and all the other caricatures that surrounded me and that we were), what did it know about what had really happened? What did the country know about its fate? That country lay somewhere beyond the balustrades of the Bastion's cleanly swept promenade and behind the foggy panorama of János Hill: a reality that was not a caricature. And on this day in March 1938, this reality underwent the kind of change that occurs when a tectonic quake shakes the inner structure of a region. In its first moments such a tremor is barely perceptible; only the lamp sways in the room, a glass tumbles off the table, one notes and looks around anxiously because something he doesn't understand and doesn't see is happening, something without color, sound and smell. It is just "happening." "Something happened" on this morning not just to those strolling on the Bastion's promenade. "Something happened" in the offices, in the Royal Palace, then down below, in Budapest and, through a capillary-like network, in the rest of the country. The same imperceptible and soundless event "happened" everywhere, that colorless, odorless tremor against which there is no defense and which geologists call a tectonic movement and historians History. But "something happened" not just in the nation's organism, its viscera and glands, but also farther away in the neighboring states. Then everywhere in the West, in Europe. Paris, Rome and Warsaw remained in place on the map and in the reality of geographical location. But Europe in its entirety did not remain fixed in that cohesion in which it had congregated after the First World War, when something formerly called Europe was crudely cut apart and so offhandedly pieced together. It was no longer what it formerly was because Adolf Hitler had marched into Vienna at the head of his troops. Hungary was still in

its place, on the map and in reality, but at this moment the country already was no longer clearly visible. Suddenly everything was covered by a fine fog, as when someone begins telling lies.

I looked around, and something I learned in school popped into my mind for an instant, dimly as in a moment of danger, when sick with an acute fever, one links loose and fast-moving images. Once there was a country which nomadic figures from Eastern tribes belonging to the Uralic-Altaic family of languages and related to the Finno-Ugrian and Tartar-Turkish sub-tribes occupied a thousand years ago on the way from the slopes of the Urals, from Lebedia. Then they Christianized it, founded and fashioned it into a state. During the course of centuries, the Hungarians' society was augmented by Swabians, Slavs and Jews. This country, which generals, statesmen, poets and hundreds of millions of anonymous individuals built, was a reality on this day, too; it loomed from an airplane or in a poet's soul. It was a beautiful country, and remained so after its recent dismemberment, even without the Carpathians, Transylvania, Upper Northern Hungary and the South, and Fiume. It possessed wheat, oil, coal and all kinds of foodstuffs. It had poets. On this day, too, several poets were sitting in Budapest cafés; a copy of Apollinaire or Rilke lay on the marble-topped table; they were translating a poem at that very moment, or arguing and jealous of each other.

Then suddenly, to my surprise, I sensed that something was lacking. Like the asthmatic who all of a sudden doesn't get any air. I felt something was missing from these images like experience from the choking breath. The truth was missing. On this day – and in the short years following – it became clear that everything surrounding me was only an illusion; the independence of a small people, the right to national self-determination – all this was only a mirage. Later,

I read that Bukharin, Rosa Luxemburg and Radek described the right to national self-determination as "bourgeois idealism." (This awakening on the Bastion resembled one's passing his life with someone and the moment coming when he recovers his senses because he doesn't really know who and what the person he spent his life with was truly like. And with a sudden eager, passionate curiosity he would like it if the one who kept continually silent "about it" – about what? the "reality" – would finally, finally, in the last minute, speak his mind. He kept silent about his own reality.) I would have finally liked to know what Hungary was really like.

In that moment of realization, I sensed for the first time, and later many times in terribly alien settings, that I did not know. There was and is something eerie in this ignorance.

On that day, Léon Blum, who, at the head of the People's Front, constantly voted down military appropriations in the French assembly for years, protested indignantly. Chamberlain was silent because England was unprepared and "the wind had to be let out of the sails." Mussolini posted a guard at the Alps with his rifle at rest; in short, he did nothing. Roosevelt was also silent; he was far from the scene. Stalin certainly was thinking about something on that morning, but he was already a famous and excellent listener. And because everyone was silent, only the Vienna radio spoke. Hungary was also mute.

That morning, there down below, the apartment house in which I lived was still standing. It was time for me to go back – on this day as on others – to engage in writing for a few hours, thus to write an article or a novel under the misconception that doing so had some sort of meaning. As if the words, no matter whether beautiful or ugly, could alter anything going on in the world. Nevertheless, I shall write whatever I write in the hope of "success;" I shall give "success" a

wink, though I know that the fermenting, gratifying feeling that constitutes "success" is, in reality, never more than a misconception or, more often, a wretched deception. Just the same, I shall write something on this day, too, because I am a writer, in Hungary in 1938. I know fairly precisely what I want to say, what I am thinking when I write. But what does the country want and think?

What else was down there? One could see in the depths the church where the "greatest Hungarian," István Széchenyi, vowed eternal faithfulness to his wife, Crescentia Seilern, but this marriage, in the opinion of the residents of Krisztinaváros, where there was much gossip, was not completely harmonious. I still saw all this that morning for an instant. The *Weltanschauung* stood before me sharply and clearly: the reality. I could not know in advance with my intellectual faculty, but I thought I heard a voice with another, internal organic microphone, saying: everything I was seeing would on this very day begin to dissolve, disintegrate, become amorphous, as chemists say, because forces were exerting an impact on this solid mass which it could no longer resist cohesively. And in a little while, everything I saw would no longer exist. Not a single person of importance would remain in place. The Regent in the Royal Palace, the prime minister in the mansion, and the others, the aristocrats, the citizens, the anonymous, all of us would abandon our way of life and lifestyle, and, yes, most of the dwellings would also crumble into dust. Everything and everyone still in their places at this moment would disintegrate into nothing, or begin to jerk, like the Clown and the Hunter and the Soldier in the shooting gallery when a clumsy champion accidentally hits the bull's eye and all the figures suddenly begin to move with a mechanical, clattering, grotesque jerking. I didn't know this through my intellect that morning on the Bastion, but it seems I suspected something, because

otherwise the microfilm would not have preserved the image with such extraordinary fidelity.

This day, when I first walked on Castle Hill after the siege, was the last time I visited the old section of the city. I never went that way again. And because it was almost noon, it was time to go home – more precisely, to return to the *ersatz* home that would never again be “home,” no matter where I would rent cubic feet wrapped in cement in the world. For this reason I walked down the Granite Stairs with the cautiousness of a mountain climber, avoiding the dangerous obstacles that had been the walls of dwellings not long ago. I hurried as fast as I could because Lola had already cooked the *prósza* or the *sterc* (at the time, some weeks following the siege, we ate disgusting meals with such sinister names because there wasn’t anything else to eat). It was time to go home; after all, I had seen the Bastion, which unfortunately was destroyed; I saw the bust of Károly P. Szakmáry, which unfortunately survived; and I had seen the Royal Palace, where no one ruled any more. I had seen once more the *piano nobile*, the small mansions where no one lived any more because in the end here, too, time had solved the problem of paying a progressive real tax in a practical way. Taxes no longer had to be paid because there wasn’t anything for the taxpayers to pay on. In the end, everything was taken away from everyone. So the question of taxation was finally solved more fundamentally in Hungary than in the West – I thought of this, too, but only incidentally. I understood that I was not the only caricature in the milieu between the two world wars; there was, instead, some kind of caricature in Hungarian life, in the institutions, in the way people looked at things, in everything. This comforted me. It is always good to know that one is not alone.

A specialist who professionally investigated the habits and attitudes of people inhabiting areas that had been struck by earthquakes reported that in such places – in the vicinity of Naples, in Sicily and then in Japan, Persia and the Aleutian Islands – they don't like to lead a continuously sedentary way of life. They sit down but then immediately get up and start pacing. Terror – the terror of an earthquake, the complete lack of protection and the hopeless vulnerability – continues to affect their nervous systems like a conditioned reflex. They don't dare to sit around confidently because they fear that at any moment they will have to spring up and run out into the open; the ceiling may very well fall on their heads and the ground give way under their feet.

These were the kinds of ebbing and flowing, signs of restless coming and going that were evident in Budapest in the period following the war's end. The earthquake that shook the world concept above its inhabitants' heads and under their feet wasn't merely the precariousness of their society and existence after the lost war. People, knowingly or unknowingly but in large numbers, believed that the very certitude on which their parents and then they themselves and their children had built their every concern, ambition and hope had been destroyed.

This was why they immediately looked about for things requiring urgent action. With the passing of the first earthquake, the fact of military occupation and the presence of grim but, for the time being, still warily maneuvering Communists prodded people into frenzied activity. There was as yet no trace of that apathy, that state of mind when an individual responds with indifference to permanent danger of high voltage, because indifference is, in calamitous situations, one form of courage. This listless indifference

set in only later, when people realized that everyone had left them high and dry, and they could expect nothing. Then apathy abruptly heated up to a revolutionary feverishness, but during the first two years there was still no sign of such a hysterical change in attitude. The day at hand was more exciting than the concern about what the future might hold.

Every morning, many people began the day like fire insurance assessors trying to estimate and evaluate the damage after a horrible conflagration. The Royal Palace was "kaput," as they said in the day's jargon, but the Parliament escaped damage. Most of the buildings in Krisztinaváros had collapsed, but some sort of government agency was already functioning in several rooms on the floor of an inner-city bank, and handwritten signs were hanging on the doors: "Prime Minister" or "Undersecretary." All the magnificent bridges over the Danube, the work of a hundred years, had tumbled into the river, but already the word was that a pontoon bridge linked Pest and Buda. Only a pile of rubble remained of the family home, but Jenő had returned from the concentration camp. The firm where the managing clerk had worked for thirty years was gone, but grandma was found in quite good condition in a Pesterzsébet cellar. Bomb blasts had blown off the sliding shutters, but the former managing editor of a once liberal daily undertook to obtain new shutters for dollars. The Comedy Theater was in ruins, but the National Theater was presenting performances. Its current repertory offering was *Ban Bánk*, and so one had to wait for the people to get fed up with this play, and then it would be possible to present something else. Only black bread was available, but luxury cars hastily imported from America were already wending their way through streets of rubble, and in the fall of 1945 it was announced in a newspaper that the time had come again to hold a car show in Budapest.

Some individuals discovered that more opportunities were available to them among the ruins than in the past, when everything was still in place. A third-rate journalist who never rose higher than reporter at a daily promptly joined one of the political parties and found, with happy surprise, that he could become an undersecretary in the near future. Dishonesty spread like the bubonic plague. Law and justice did not exist anywhere, but People's Tribunals were already operating, and political executions afforded daily entertainment to the unemployed rabble, as in the time of Caligula in Rome. The Tabán District had been destroyed, but confirmed old alcoholics set out on their emotional pilgrimage, the rumor being that the wine shops in Óbuda were not damaged. The poet who had escaped from a concentration camp appropriated on his own and without a twinge of conscience an abandoned villa on a gentle slope in Buda whose owner had died of starvation in a Nazi flaying-house (he was "bourgeois," so you didn't have to feel sorry for him) or had escaped to the West (he was a "fascist," so you didn't have to feel sorry for him either). Variations of the written and unwritten laws of "mine and thine" became grotesque conversational puns.

But merchants, who somehow made it home from the concentration camp or staggered out of a cellar, had by morning raised their shutters, obtained and sold merchandise. That "private enterprise" which the Communists condemned to death was, even in its primitive forms, such a productive and distributive force that the system could not do without it temporarily. Doctors and lawyers hung out their shingles on house fronts. Starving workers ran electricity into Budapest. Amidst the tremendous gasping, hectic human diligence, ignominy masked its real intentions with specious words. The "Purchasing Sections," the "Commission for Abandoned Property" and other such enigmatic outfits pillaged zealously and shamelessly. Con-

comitant signs announcing "Acts of Justice" in the name of "land distribution" conjured up bewildering, grotesque human phenomena. The poet of the people, panting ecstatically at this distribution, strode around the country blowing his trumpet like someone filling the role of the nation's archangel, of the nation's seraph. However, it quickly became apparent that he was, in reality, only the minstrel splitting fifty-fifty with the bands of looting guerrillas.

Telephones were still not functioning, and at this time the curious opportunities for social intercourse from past centuries were revived: as in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when not just the aristocrats led a social life regulated by elegant ceremonies, but Colbert's class, the bourgeoisie, at the encouragement of the Sun King shaken by the aristocrats' revolt, also mimicked the snobbery attending the customs of visiting, so in Budapest, with the passing of the first year after the siege, callers dropped in without invitation or prior notice. Such familiarity was understandable if relatives, friends or close acquaintances were living with one, but it was surprising when perfect strangers knocked on the door simply because "we happened to be in the neighborhood" or "we heard you had made it, too, and so we've stopped by." The assumption that visiting is proper only according to accepted social compacts never occurred to the callers because they reckoned that the time had already arrived when "everything will be different" from the old days and vexatious proprieties no longer existed between human beings, nor a social catechism. The society whose code used to differentiate between the "seated guest" (who was invited) and the "standing guest" (who dropped in uninvited and so was not seated) already belonged to the past. So thought the uninvited visitors.

During the first months of our resettling in Buda, we not infrequently experienced such visits. Ab-

solite strangers dropped in early in the morning or late in the evening without invitation or notice; they arrived with the interest of the casual zoologist who goes to the zoo after the siege because he wants to know whether the puma or the tapir was still alive. In this familiarity – and the absence of tact – there was something “Russian” and “human.” We were, of course, happy to see everyone, and if in our confusion we didn’t offer a seat to our visitor, we didn’t have to rack our brains about how to handle the situation because the guest, slipping in uninvited, sat down cheerfully and comfortably, sometimes staying longer than we first hoped. We reassured and consoled ourselves with the thought that there was something good in this, that social leveling was beginning to take shape, that the classless society was not an empty promise. But after the first surprise visits passed, we became aware that it wasn’t a well-meaning interest that prompted unexpected visitors to knock on the door of a strange house. The real reason for the visit quickly became apparent from the chattering conversations: it was hatred.

Later, when collective misery and terror drew people closer to each other – in the sham solidarity of fear – this psychosis of hatred abated. But in the earliest years after the siege, hatred erupted with its noxious and searing breath from and against human beings during conversations, just as when one, unguardedly careless, opens the door of a hellishly overheated furnace. Why this hatred? Because the other one had survived. Because the other one hadn’t suffered as much or in the same way. Because he who had suffered didn’t receive recompense immediately. Hatred because everything was inadequate, every punishment and every recompense. Because the punishment this world deserves could not be dispensed ruthlessly enough. Because the hoped-for compensation could not be plentiful and abundant enough. Because

others received more, or they stole. And there was the hatred stemming from not finding in the ruins – nor later after the ruins were cleared away – the one they were searching for or what they were foraging for. Actually, whom were they searching for? Our visitors sometimes disclosed this, sputtering and stammering. Those divulged this to us who had already returned to their homes, or become an undersecretary, or opened a shop, or got Mariska back. They stated that this hatred, like the addict's thirst for opium, doesn't slake, can't be sated. Because everyone was waiting for "someone" to return, and the one they were waiting for did not come back. They were waiting for the one most important to them, the one and only. That person meant more to them than the house, ambition, mission, pleasure, revenge. The one they kept expecting to return mattered more to them than anything else in the world. It was as if there was a one-and-only companion in everyone's life – not a parent, wife, lover or friend but secretly the one-and-only to whom the chromosomes responded with a special biochemical energy – and everyone realized that that single person, who was perhaps a child, perhaps a lover or a wife, no longer existed. Not even if that person escaped from various hells, if, shabby and infested, he hobbled back home. Not even when he came back with a guilty conscience (he had a guilty conscience because he had escaped with his life), and fell on his knees to express his gratitude. There was no one for them to expect to return, because the very one they thought to be in limbo, the one they expected to return from Gehenna, never did come back. He died in the labyrinths descending into Hell. He died even when he escaped physically. Because the one who did survive Hell and came back was no longer the person they had been waiting for.

An individual suffering such a disappointment starts to hate. After the first sobs and embraces, the moment came among mothers and children when they

would look into each other's eyes in dismay and then begin talking about other matters. Married couples, lovers and – the most mysterious of all human relationships – friends, would rush toward each other with arms spread wide. Later, the outspread arms would often sag because very close family members and, yes, lovers and friends would suspect and scent with shock, sometimes with indignation that the other did not hate enough what they themselves hated. This was the overwhelming question in the crucial moments in the examination of private and social life: "Do you hate what I hate, or are you indifferent and tolerant?" And if someone did not hate enough, people begin to hate him.

Everyone, it seemed, had "someone" who had disappeared. And the one who returned, emaciated or fat – sometimes wasted away to the bone – was charitable about what had happened or else was bent on revenge. Or he was dead-tired and indifferent. But something had happened to him, too, to everyone, and society, it seemed, realized it had waited in vain. It had waited in vain not only for an individual but also for the other, the changed and more humane social order which people believed would now become a reality. This "waiting for" is the true, the hidden act of life. Becket's inspired pantomime was still unknown at the time, but after the war everyone was waiting for Godot. And Godot never came. Where did he die? In a concentration camp or on a battlefield or in a cellar? Or in the chambers of betrayal, in the foul, putrid caves of cowardice? ... People realized, there was no one and nothing to wait for. And they began to hate.

Inflation served as combustible matter to the glowing embers of hatred, like a shovel of shavings on a smoldering fire. At first it appeared soundlessly, insidiously, like hemophilia, the bleeder's disease. The peasants, the sharks and Party parasites became paunchy and prosperous. Everyone else lost blood. The

graybeards of the intellectual, working, and bourgeois classes languished and withered day by day, like consumptives. For a short time, junk still turned up to sell item by item: an old pocket watch, a bracelet, a gold tooth from a grandfather's inheritance, a wedding ring. People thought they would survive the paper plague with such synthetic victuals. But they quickly discerned that during inflation they not only lost weight – without experiencing any physical pain – but their remaining, limited energy also dried up.

The peasants knew their time had come. They could not delay taking advantage of their opportunities. At the very time when they were getting rich by trading a water-bloated, fattened pig for a piano, for Napoleon gold pieces on the market in Pest; intellectuals, workers and civil servants waited every day, more pale, more hungry and more hopelessly, to find out what kind of bizarre hocus-pocus they would have to go through on the next day, what the value of money would be. In the few hours of the morning, the paper rags that then passed for legal tender changed hands with value of inexpressible billions, in the form of astronomical digits. In the morning, the housewife dashed to a part-time extortionist, to a moneychanger; she sold a few grams of the wedding ring she had deposited with him, and bolted at a run for the market hall where the voucher could be exchanged for food-stuff until twelve noon – the time of the noon closing exchange rate on the money market was the magical boundary line when that day's valuation of money ended, because the dollar or gold was worth several thousand million or billions more in the morning, at the opening moment. Already, no one could pronounce the numbers: "Give me two blues with the yellow and you can take the duck," said the woman at the market stand, and the housewife, despairing, kept haggling: "I won't give you any blues but I'll give you another green." People once again perceived that at the bottom

of human enterprises there is something anti-intellectual that is more powerful than the reasoning of the mind.

During the months of inflation, most Budapest inhabitants became as skeletally thin as the sketches of the human structure found in anatomy books, without any flesh and fat. In these months the vast majority of humans passed through more dreary and harrowing physical hardships than during the siege, when everyone set food aside and the compulsion of the solidarity created by the common danger prompted the prudent and the selfish to share their limited rations with their fellow sufferers in the cellars. No longer was there any trace of this empathy present amidst the misery of inflation. Since it wasn't sheer life but money, possessions, the tangible that had to be rescued, people responded with more heartless selfishness to the emergency than they had to the perils of the siege.

This pallid hemophilia, inflation, stirred the embers of the psychosis of hatred. Now the course of the great dispute surged, not between the workers and the bourgeoisie but between the peasants and the nonpeasant classes of the population. An insidiously inflammatory myth did its utmost to make the general public in Hungary believe that the peasantry comprised not just a social class but a mystical fount of energy, a legendary and ancient reserve of consciousness, the profound foundation of national existence. But the greater part of society could see nothing more in the peasants than Hungarian citizens who worked in the agricultural sector. Their rights could not be separated from the rights and duties of the other classes of society. (The Commission of Human Rights was already established, but no one said a word about the Commission of Human Duties.) The Communists, with ironic magnanimity, offered land distribution to the peasants and, smirking, waited for the moment when, holding a pizzle, they

would ask the peasants to leave their portion of the land, exactly the way they had earlier ousted the landowners. The great dispute turned into a cynical, grotesque political tactic. The thousand-year-old dispute – the vital dispute about the destitute, outrageously remunerated cottier peasants – had to be concluded, in Hungary, too, as earlier everywhere in Europe. The Communists, rubbing their hands, played the role of a Santa Claus handing out gifts, knowing that the “distribution” was not a conclusion but the first step in a new brutal serfdom rivaling everything that had preceded it.

The peasants were suspicious. They accepted the land – not always with the greedy eagerness the distributors expected – and waited to see how this fabulous distribution, like a fantastic gift bought at a fair, would turn out. In any event, the peasants understood that the inflation was a transitional period during which they could make their potential energy felt with ruthless consistency. The moment had arrived when they could demand from consumers not only a just return for their labor and products, but, on top it all, also the piano, the pocket watch, the family jewels, every shiny object that glittered along the roadway and on the social rubbish pile. At this time Hungary was like a man whose leg was amputated and his blood was draining away. The Soviets stole the products of its heavy industries under the guise of reparations; everything else – food and manufactured goods – drained into the conduits of inflation.

The hatred that this overwhelming misery kindled was “an autotelic,” even “spontaneously active” force – thus were these phenomena called in the execrable jargon of modern days. People did not look for excuses to hate; they hated on their own, independent of the intellect. The “Hymnus,” the national anthem, can’t be sung on an empty stomach, wrote a consumptive pamphleteer, Dezső Szabó; the moment had

arrived when people realized that the "Internationale" can't be sung on an empty stomach either, that it wasn't possible to speak about acts of social justice on a growling stomach. Books analyzing the phenomenon of "the morality of hatred" were published. This wasn't a strictly Hungarian phenomenon. The psychosis of hatred, built on the ruins of the sham morality of nineteenth-century liberalism and humanism and on contaminated racial formulas, spread inflammation in all directions. The colored hated whites, every white person worldwide. Proletarians hated capitalists; peasants rebelled against landowners – in Mexico, China and everywhere in South America – and members of the intelligentsia hated "political economists" and "sociologists," these horn-rimmed analysts who saw statistical raw material in human beings and agricultural production because they didn't believe in humankind and life but in methods and material results. In Hungary, the reddish reflection of inflation illuminated the artificially befogged reality of the relation between society and the peasantry. The Communists saw to it that, not much later, the peasantry would also wind up in the losers' camp. Two profiteers chomping with bulging cheeks remained on the scene: the Party's parasites and the backslapping intellectuals who signed a pact with the Communists.

But at the time of this inflation everyone hated everyone else. It wasn't only the peasants who were despised. The workers and the intelligentsia saw the displays of French champagne and perfume, Strasbourg goose-liver paste, English books and American cameras in the shop windows on Váci Street. Chief governmental counselors moved back into the abandoned villas on the Rózsadomb, renovated the rooms and, amidst the Faustian legerdemain and chaos of inflation, argued with the upholsterer about what kind of pastel-hued covering he was to put on the walls of milady's dressing room. During early morning hours,

owners who had again moved back from houses marked with the yellow star of David or from safe havens in the provinces could be observed – conforming to Voltaire’s advice – in the gardens of Pasarét: they cultivated their gardens with an amiable earnestness and walked among the fuchsia with a sprinkling can. The hungry who walked past the fence knew that they weren’t watering the fuchsia but the Napoleon gold pieces they had buried in the family garden before the Arrow Cross came. Notorious evil men walked diligently in the Farkasréti Cemetery to “pay tribute” at friendly graves where they had buried the family jewels under the wooden crosses. Elderly speculators in the stock market discovered domestic inclinations in themselves and concealed dollars wrapped in onion-skin paper in canning jars, steaming and then sealing the jars with wax. Sometimes they forgot where they had buried their treasure; then, wheezing, they dug at midnight, because experts also resided in the neighborhood who promptly began digging the next night where they suspected some traces of digging at dawn. The moral imperatives of a society had been destroyed. And everyone hated everyone else.

The wounded, scarred, scabby, ruined city did not complain like Job on the rubbish pile; rather, it smoldered with hatred. What we call “the action of life” – the film strip, the experience of swiftly consecutive picture squares – broke for me on the day when I came to understand there was no longer anyone to wait for. The picture album I occasionally leaf through remained. The pictures, as in a pagan *Biblia pauperum*, are sketchy, primitively tinted squares of memory. I don’t have to shut my eyes to see this picture album across seas, continents and the oceanic vista of old age, I see the little pictures sharply.

This hatred spawned astonishing by-products. For instance, the Jewish police officer who entered the Emke Café on the Boulevard on a night in December 1945.

At that moment of historical change, this café resembled the nostalgic hallucination of a fever-ridden patient suffering chills, his teeth chattering; in unheated, frigid Budapest, on the Boulevard, where the insides of many houses hung out, and among the loitering Russian looters, the toughs of Pest and the patrols of Russian infantry pretending to maintain public order, a peacetime café, the Emke, opened a few months after the siege in all its synthetic and nickel-silver splendor. Festoons of electric bulbs glittered in the lukewarm restaurant; artificial palms flaunted their imitation oriental luxury; the proprietor's wife sat enthroned in the buffet, surrounded by silver mirrors; waiters in shabby black uniforms and napkins stuck under their arms rushed flat-footed between tables, setting them with snow-white damask, imitation silverware and cheap china. Artificial flowers gathered dust in table vases, and the Gypsy orchestra settled down in the corner fully ready to play: the *prímás*, the violist, the bass fiddler, the cymbalist, the piccolo player. As in the past, they, the waiters and the Gypsies, waited for the merry guests who would have the pensive and lively dance music played for them. Owing to some freakish chance, not only was the building undamaged, but all the peacetime fixtures of this old café on the Boulevard had also escaped: it wasn't ransacked, everything was spared. The proprietor bustled and wheeled among the tables, inquiring about the wishes of his esteemed guests. The revolving door leading to the kitchen turned continually, the waiters carrying out the costly meals listed on the extensive menu on nickel-silver platters. Everything in the starv-

ing city could be had here, everything that its inhabitants had by then spoken of for months only in hushed recollections: heaps of meat, savory sauces, vintage wines cooling in silver-plated buckets. This is what the Emke was like in Budapest in December 1945.

At the tables, in the lukewarmness redolent of the scent of food, sat the surviving specimens of the regular customers from the neighboring boulevard cafés who somehow rode out the horrors, escaped and returned from captivity or hiding: merchants, lawyers and doctors, the so-called petty bourgeois intelligentsia of the Boulevard. They dined here with their families because their wives had already discovered that some beauty shops had opened in the Inner City; seamstresses taking on work only in their homes had also turned up, and so they hurried to evening sessions to get fitted properly. The Gypsies played softly; the cutlery and the porcelain plates provided the familiar clatter of peacetime. The waiters recorded the orders on the bill with the old routine words of the trade (pickles, yes; fried, yes;) the wine steward, cigar vendor and bread girl hovered around the well-laid table, where, next to the regular customers that turned up quickly and surprisingly intact, dark Kirghiz and Chuwash occupied places, the shirkers attired in the pointed fur cap and the quilted Chinese coat of the occupying army, with the ladies whom they had recently become acquainted with on the chilly corners of the Boulevard. This mixed company – the regular customers and the new kind of guests – took stock of each other with stealthy glances. The great changing of the guard, the whirlwind of history tossed this gathering together. It was an odd hodgepodge, and the old waiters of Pest served the Chuwash, their ladies and the shoe store owners of the neighborhood impassively and stolidly, with the same sleepy and wise, disdainful indifference as they had the chief governmental counselors of a snobbish society in a time of peace.

This was the half-historical, half-prosperous situation that the Jewish police officer entered. He was a distant relative of mine. He had been a bank official, and in times before Hitler and the Arrow Cross, he drank coffee and played cards in the Emke every afternoon with other Jewish petty bourgeois. His family, I knew, perished in the holocaust, his mother and younger sister at Auschwitz, and his younger brother failed to return from a concentration camp. Recognizing me, he greeted me politely, his hand touching the brim of his hat. He stopped at the revolving door, and the checkroom attendant hurried to help him remove his brand-new leather coat, and took the gloves and riding-whip from his hands. Every article of his clothing was new and cut to measure: the laced top-boots, the gold-braided cap embellished with a colonel's insignia. The bank official vanished in the whirl of the fancy masked ball; in his place appeared an all-powerful official personage. The proprietor and the waiters hurried to find a nicely located table for him, and the police officer walked slowly and majestically between the tables. He sat down with easy, leisurely movements. Everyone was watching him. And he knew that at that moment he was the eminent figure in the establishment.

In this situation, at this time in Budapest, this Jewish police officer held sway over life and death. At a wave of his hand, the myrmidons of the summarily organized national security squads carried off to notorious cellars everyone he pointed to. He did whatever he wanted to. At present, he wanted to have dinner. With knitted eyebrows, worried expertise, and the peacetime gourmet's lip-smacking knowledge of the subject, he selected and ordered delicious morsels: perch from Lake Balaton, spongy tenderloin broiled in a net, choice garnishes. After long consultation, the wine steward opened a cobwebbed bottle of wine for him. The waiters – like musicians in an orchestra

when a renowned conductor takes the baton into his hand – were all astir. The obliging coming-and-going never ceased around the noted guest. They placed the cooler with the wine glass near the table, and they also immersed a bottle of Parádi mineral water in the ice cubes. The Gypsy *prímás* played, transfigured and softly, melodies from old operettas, and the scene was completely like the one occurring when, at the time of the changing of the guard in society, the members of the new parvenu class rush off to the opera because they want finally to see and hear *Traviata* or *Cavaliere Rusticana* which in the old days they didn't have any opportunity to hear even from the peanut gallery. This Jewish police officer now performed for himself the great scene of the old, peacetime pseudo-splendor of the Budapest boulevards. He was the Emperor of the café, as the rare guest was called in the underworld jargon of the music halls, hence, the overseer from the Alföld who made enough on fattening pigs to make an excursion to Budapest once a year and play the count at the music hall.

The Chuwash and Kirghiz also kept their eyes peeled, their machine-guns resting in front of them on the table, next to the wine glasses. There was something in the scene from a Dostoevsky chapter, the trashy atmosphere of the Karamazovs' orgies, or from the erratic comportments of Gorky's Artamonovs. For this tepidly heated, spuriously grand café in Pest, with its guests, the Jewish police colonel above all, was a compound of volatile explosive matter. The women with their armed escorts, accidentally here from the distant Steppes, watched the figure of Power Incarnate raptly and anxiously. The guests at neighboring tables pretended to converse without restraint, but, in reality, all blinked around restlessly, for, after all, everyone was hiding something: a cental of rancid butter for the black market, a cigar box stuffed with bits and pieces of gold, or some crime. And no one could

know whether or not the police colonel was keeping a record of anonymous denunciations in his notebook, the accusatory documents of vengeful attempts to settle old or more recent grudges. But for the moment, the powerful guest took no notice of the setting. The reverently attentive waiters served with the ardor of altar boys this potentate who truly celebrated the supper the way a priest did the rites. He ate and drank as if everything were natural and normal.

After the savory meal, the waiter served the aromatic machine-percolated coffee, the cigar vendor hurried to select a spotted *trabukó* and lighted it, and the police officer blew out the smoke with a full stomach and contented facial expression. Like the guests, the proprietor noted the dangerous officer's mien with a smile of relief. Everyone breathed freely again; the police officer's cordial behavior and civil demeanor dispelled the suspicion that he was about to cause some trouble. And truly, the powerful man, gorged, smoking his cigar and, according to all signs, relaxing in the serene state of pleasant digestion, felt fine and was amiable; he smiled, raised his glass of wine toward the table next to his to the beautiful woman sitting in the company of some regular guests from the Boulevard – without intruding, with genial gallantry – and then, holding his lighted cigar between his fingers, he signaled the *prímás* to come closer.

The Gypsy – handkerchief at his neck, violin and bow in his hand, hovering with an obsequious and overfamiliar grin and plying an old trade with the flair of a supernumerary, like someone nosing out that the eminent guest had properly mellowed and the moment for requesting a tuneful and merry melody had arrived – bowed humbly before the police officer, who whispered his request into his ear. The Gypsy nodded enthusiastically, hurried back to the band, said something in the Gypsy language to the cymbalo player and the violist, set his violin on his shoulder and raised the

bow high with spirited feeling. Reverential silence reigned in the café. In this church-like silence and stifled expectation, the memory of a peacetime and already forgotten and improbable tribal celebration also smoldered; thus did the Hungarian lord in olden times celebrate, "so we once lived in Odessa ..." the scene called this to my mind. The guests waited with uneasy curiosity for the orchestra to start playing. What did the Jewish police officer request? The Internationale or a Zerkowitz song?

The *prímás* bent his head over the violin, plucked the strings once with his fingertip, and the band followed the intonation in pianissimo. And in the church-like silence in Budapest, in December 1945, in the Emke Café on the Boulevard, at the command of the Jewish police officer, the band struck up with the specious irredentist folksong titled and beginning "You are lovely, most beautiful, Hungary/More lovely, perhaps than the whole world" – which was already considered earlier in Hungary, between the two world wars, to be not a folksong but a song by a composer – and now, in the present setting, it was such a stridently false and ridiculously business-like expression of phoney patriotism that it roused nausea in the listeners. But the Gypsy played with feeling. The guests listened, alarmed and aghast. The waiters stopped serving. The police officer quietly placed the lighted cigar in the ashtray, folded his arms, leaned back and closed his eyes.

This man had every reason to hate. To hate the Hungary that was possibly "more lovely than the whole world" but whose officialdom had murdered his mother and siblings, humiliated him and wounded his human dignity, a Hungarian citizen born in Hungary. What did he have in mind when, in the completely altered social and power situation, he had the Gypsies play the jingoistic irredentist song in the café on the Boulevard? Was he being sarcastic? ... We looked at

the Jewish police officer with his eyes closed, and all who had assembled in the silver-mirrored café listened. The Chuwash stared with stupid facial expressions; they did not understand the scene at all. But everyone sensed that something beyond the perplexing situation was taking place: a man wanted to express something, to pay for something, to reply. No matter how infernally, derisively grotesque the scene, everyone sensed that now it wasn't only music being played, something else was also going on in the café: a man was attaining something that perhaps he had longed for all his life but had never had the opportunity to realize in the totality he always yearned for.

Many things had to happen before this man changed his costume and role to have played for him in the café in Pest this pseudo-patriotic, provokingly commercial song, almost foolishly sentimental in its content. It took Hitler and Auschwitz. It was necessary for millions of American, English and Russian young men to die in the European, African and Asian theaters of war. It was necessary for a great power, the German Reich, to be torn into pieces and for a social order and the views attending it to be destroyed in a small country, in Hungary. All this was necessary, so that this man could finally have the Gypsy play the phony, and mawkish irredentist song.

If this man, several years earlier, when he was a bank official in Pest, had one night blundered into the Emke and requested "You are lovely, Hungary" from the Gypsy, it can be presumed that someone would have turned up among the Christian guests tarrying in the café who would think: "What's this Jew playing the patriot for?" And it is possible that one or another of the Jewish regular guests would think: "Really, why is this Jew being so jingoistic?" But he didn't want to play the patriot; rather, he wanted – once in his life – to have played in the Emke the song that spoke of Hungary as being his native

land as well – even if he, the Jew whose mother tongue was Hungarian, whose closest kin were killed, who was humiliated and hounded to death, was deprived of property and rights by Hungarian society. But now the moment had arrived when he could order the song from the Gypsy in such a way that it never crossed anyone's mind in the café to smile scornfully. And no one asked: "What does this Jew want here?"

For this is what happened. It showed in those listening to the song that they didn't completely understand what was going on. But they listened, and no one smiled, neither scornfully nor any other way. The police officer – with the lethargy and closed eyes of a digesting Buddha – listened to the music without moving. When the last obscenely lachrymal and drenching, diaphragm-shaking part faded, everyone remained silent and motionless. The guest signaled for the bill. The waiters jumped and brought him the exorbitant bill on a plate, which he paid without checking it with a wad of vouchers from an inch-thick supply he drew nonchalantly from his jacket pocket. Money gushed forth like a blessing; the waiters, the Gypsy, the wine steward and the cloakroom attendant received greasy banknotes. Everyone bowed and scraped. The police officer donned his leather coat, tugged at the service belt at his waist, pressed the flat hat down on his forehead, took his gloves and riding whip in his hands and walked in deep silence with slow steps to the exit. He stopped at the revolving door and looked around. Everyone was watching him to see if he would say anything in farewell. He looked serious but didn't say a word. He raised two fingers to the brim of his hat in a salute, and wordlessly, he went out the revolving door. He had settled his account.

This mania for uniforms didn't break out in police force personnel only. One day, in the spring of 1946, I received an invitation to go to the Parliament Building because the Council for Social Reconciliation was holding a meeting there. It would be discussing the ways of healing the horrible wounds Hungarian Jews had suffered. Writers, politicians and sociologists attended the session. And also two clergymen: one was the chief rabbi of the Reformed Israelite Congregation in Budapest, the other the Catholic Chaplain General of the armed forces. The chief rabbi wore a general's uniform, the Catholic bishop a uniform bearing chaplain's insignia.

At the Social Rehabilitation meeting, the invited Jews present quarreled among themselves passionately. A member of the orthodox congregation shouted vehemently that the only practical option open to social reconciliation was to hang every anti-Semite. The Reformed rabbi in the general's uniform opposed this proposal because, he said, even if every anti-Semite were strung up, the success of social reconciliation would still not be ensured; after all, the surviving members of the hanged anti-Semite's family would presumably view this solution with revulsion, and so real peace would not prevail in the nation. But the opposite side threatened the rabbi, charging that he was betraying the cause of reconciliation by even uttering such a thing, and an Orthodox Jew with a respectable exterior, sporting a white beard and looking like a patriarch, shook his fist at the rabbi and shouted: "Wait for the coming elections!" The meeting ended in ill humor. Nothing more remained in my memory of this attempt at reconciliation than the figures of the rabbi in uniform and the bishop with insignia on his sleeve.

In mid-winter of that year, posters calling up certain age groups for conscription appeared. No one understood why. The war was over and the armed

forces were disbanded; so it just wasn't possible to comprehend why anyone in Hungary should still have to be drafted. Nevertheless, on the occasion of one of these special conscriptions some ill-informed citizens of the age groups reported to the barracks where they had formerly mustered. They stripped naked and waited, shivering, to get the baffling process over with. The old sergeant, still soldiering on, puttered about in the unheated chamber, but the officers in charge of the conscription didn't appear. After a short time, one of the draftees stripped to the bare skin said: "Bath attendant sir, it's cold in here, we're going home." The others, their teeth chattering, agreed angrily and began dressing. The old sergeant said apologetically: "You gentlemen are right. I don't know why the colonel is so late; he must not have been able to catch a tram. Please do go home." The draftee-in-spite-of-himself who later recounted this scene to me, understood only afterwards what a profound change had come to pass in Hungarian public life in the course of a year. It was unimaginable the year before that a recruit called up for conscription would address a sergeant as "bath attendant." But now that, too, was possible because it was not just the recruit who feared conscription but the sergeant and the colonel also did.

As yet no one felt any fright when the doorbell rang; after all, many homes didn't have doorbells. But people had begun to disappear; a few reappeared after a few weeks, others later, some never. The Terror gave a growl, then lay low and, like the puma in the jungle, sniffed out the direction in which the wind was blowing. For the time being, accusations – against individuals, then generally because of Hungarians' participation in the war – were uttered along with the cautious clearing of throats. People pricked up their ears. What is the extent and the nature of an individual's responsibility if the state of which he is a citizen commits acts that violate moral laws? The citizen is responsible for

his state only if he actively supports the amoral acts. His primary responsibility, at all times, is to save himself and the members of his family; he does this, however, not at the cost of carrying out commands which his conscience rejects as unlawful, but rather, with the help of any form of mimicry possible, he stays alive without assisting with murder when tyranny sinks to that level and without going fifty-fifty when it stoops to crimes against humanity; nor is he willing to be a well-paid favorite where collusion is the price for preferential treatment. People came to their senses and began to understand that the principle of "collective guilt" is an immoral deception because one can sharply judge and distinguish between the "guilty" and those merely present when others committed crimes: they were present because they had no choice.

As yet, no one felt any fright when the doorbell rang, but already there was sometimes some knocking at night and in daytime on house doors. In one of his essays, "On the Knocking at the Gate in Macbeth," de Quincey noted that he could never understand why this knocking affected him so balefully and terrifyingly. Perhaps it was, so he wrote, because after a heinous deed executed with all its consequences "the witness feels sympathy not only for the victim but also for the murderer". (The old *staretz* says something similar in the Karamazov. In English, "sympathy" signifies not just fellow-feeling but also "understanding." It must have been a romantic age when a contemporary still found it possible to hearken to the knocking at night with understanding.) Can cruelty be "humane"? The conjecture does sound absurd. But the cruelty that one individual commits against another is still always "human cruelty"; it contains surprise and horror, and also the possibility of a catharsis. The human propensity for cruelty didn't alter an iota with the changing cultural periods; there isn't a qualitatively distinctive "Asian," nor "ancient," nor "modern," nor "Euro-

pean" form of cruelty. There are only moments when the inhibitions – only God knows why – are sometimes stronger than the propensity for cruelty. (Five thousand years ago, the Assyrians created a highly refined civilization; they stood at the front of the world stage in the footlights; peoples watched and applauded them. Their legislation surpassed later Roman law in their hairsplitting legal reasoning; their art was sweeping in its scope, rather their architecture, and thus declamatory. They weren't much concerned about details and the immortalizing of the character of individuality, but their chess-like moves in international politics, their social structure, and their concepts of divinity were completely "modern"; they were the ventures of a people observing the present and future, the human and superhuman with a broad horizon. And meanwhile, the Assyrians, too – like the Chinese, the Romans, and later the French, English, Germans and Russians – were cruel in a beastly way.) Cruelty can not be viewed as a phenomenon tied to a specific period – it is a phenomenon above time and history. The Assyrians were great rulers; the Tiglathpileasers, Ashurnasirpals and Shalmanesers were first-rate builders of canals and churches, carvers of divine images and patrons of the arts, but they all agreed that gouging out the enemy's eyes, cutting out his tongue and chopping off his hand were natural and human enterprises. Ashurnasirpal II had chiseled in black marble the recorded memory of the "triumphant and wise" act by which he had Ahijababa, the prince of Aram, flayed alive in Nineveh and his relatives impaled, and then had the "members of his retinue decapitated and their heads stacked into a pile, and girls and boys incinerated." As in Auschwitz forty-five hundred years later. As in Katyn. As...yes, in Budapest, at 60 Andrassy Road.

What is the real cause of human cruelty? Is it "suppression"? The basic stuff of organic life is protein

and nucleic acids. Millions of years are needed for a molecule to stand in the line of evolution on a planet with a biosphere and become a complex organism. The molecule itself is not cruel. But this very same molecule is, in its developed, human version, cruel. Why? No other organism is disposed to cruelty, only man. Is the panic resulting from the consciousness of death the cause of cruelty? We know nothing; all who live are sentenced to die; we are inmates on death row summoned by heedless, blind chance to live in an indifferent and dark universe. The overcrowded world devised new forms of torture in addition to personal, cunning, "humane" cruelty; such are official torture, cruelty by edict, governmental harassing of private life and statutory crippling of the natural rights of man. This institutional cruelty isn't more lenient than the individual, the bureaucratic or the personal. Bureaucratic, mechanical, impersonal cruelty debases a human being, while personal cruelty modestly "contents itself" with causing pain. And now – once again in uniform – cruelty appeared in Budapest.

The characters who marched around in the new uniforms were the very same ones who did so not so long ago, at the time of the Nazis, the greenshirts and the brownshirts. Only the colors of their uniforms had changed. The characters wearing the uniforms were the very same ones because they did the same thing: they produced Terror expertly.

Just as when a pipe bursts in the street of a big city, a cloaca splits open and a noisome stench spreads on the streets and spills into the houses, so the word spread that Terror was again afoot in the city. At first, the machinery of Terror functioned discreetly. Those who operated it knew that persecution, police harassment and torture never quashed mass movements. Just as persecution strengthened Christianity, and as police, political and social persecution could not wipe out the underground nor later the above-ground move-

ments of Socialism and Communism, so an invisible battle line gained ground in Budapest when the news got around that the Monster, the Terror was afoot in the city. This was not a "counterrevolution"; it was, rather, a disposition, an atmosphere, an instinctive mien. People understood with loathing that in the name of the One True Ideal, everyone who did not believe in the Ideal was again going to be persecuted; and so the persecuted, or the persons who fell into the potentially dangerous zone of class – intellectuals, peasants, self-respecting workers – stiffened into a battle line that did not seek martyrdom but neither did it retire into a coward's foxhole.

The Terror organization knew that every terror has its high point, its Thermidor, when not only Robespierre's head falls, but the turn of the headsman and the headsman's assistants also comes. Cruelty, however, is a narcotic with which no one can be sated once he has tried it. The dosage of cruelty has to be constantly increased in order to provide gratification, like doses of morphine or heroin. The Uniformed Man appeared in the streets of Hungarian cities and in the offices. The uniformed of the People's Republic, dressed stylishly in flat hats, tunics and service belts, resembled the gaudily appareled soldiers of South American republics who carry out operetta putsches under the authority of dictators of the moment. There was something exotic, grotesque and ludicrous, at the same time frightening about the sprouting of these uniforms.

One afternoon – it may have been in spring 1946 – I was walking along the avenue once called Andrassy Road when on one of the balconies of the infamous house numbered 60, I observed several youths of a state security detail who had recently donned their uniforms. It must have been after a day of work well done – or during it – for they stood grinning on the balcony with hands on hips, and laughing boisterously, observed people walking worriedly, wearily on the side-

walk. They stood there self-confidently, cockily, like persons who knew that complete power rested in their hands; with a whistle they could order any of the pedestrians into the building with the execrable reputation, where they could do whatever they wanted to people in torture chambers without anyone holding them to account – for the time being – for the cruelties they committed. Their faces were appallingly familiar; they were the very same faces seen on the very same balcony the year before, when the Arrow Cross was quartered there; only their names had changed: Brother Szappanos changed his clothes and become Comrade Dögei or someone like that.

They guffawed domineeringly, with open mouths and hands on their hips. Whatever human cruelty could devise all came to pass in this building: in the cellars, in the interrogation rooms on the floors with windows protected by bars. Here the Arrow Cross had “interrogated” and murdered. Now the ÁVÓ marched here in smartly tailored uniforms. Here they organized the Terror as the only possibility of extending the means – until then – of imposing an anti-human outrage on the people, the pure fraud of so-called Communism, disguised Socialism with violence and trickery.

Like some horrible apparition in a nightmare, Terror reappeared in the city. It was as if an unexpectedly fetid, life-threatening gas had pervaded the air and life. What hope was left if these chaps could once again stand in uniforms on the balcony of the house of torture? A fireman can't be made out of a pyromaniac; it is futile to make a policeman out of a thief, to retrain a murderer as a butcher or surgeon. Experience has taught that all pedagogy is hopeless, that it is futile to gloss over the natural propensities of mankind, cruelty for example. The person inclined to murder remains a murderer even when he puts on a political uniform. These uniformed experts looked down at passersby from the balcony of the flaying-house called 60 And-

rassy Road and grinned contentedly because they had obtained the greatest satisfaction that persons of this sort can dream of: the right to be cruel and the reassurance that they would not be held responsible for the horrors they commit since, after all, they did what they did "in behalf of the people." They were the Reality, the prop and pillar of the System. (Hungarian poets turned up who egged them on in eloquently resounding verses to "do their duty." Perhaps de Quincey was thinking of this: is a human being obliged to feel sympathy for a fellow human being who has lost his human qualities to so great an extent that he undertakes this kind of role?)

Who, what sort of person was now putting on the uniform? The sadistic "prole" not the "proletarian," not the one belonging to the class of the humiliated and dispossessed, but the individual living at the fringe, the prole. He put on a uniform and grabbed a blackjack, and this phenomenon was at least as much a ghastly character in a novel as it was a frightful reality. This is the sort of person who doesn't feel, ruminate, struggle; he practices his trade with business-like impassivity even in extraordinary situations, like the hangman adjusting the noose around the condemned's neck with scrupulous objectivity. Those ÁVÓs on the balcony of the flaying-house, they were the uniformed proles; no other sociographic designation fits them.

There isn't a more miserable, more degraded enemy than the prole. At least the gunman who commits heinous crimes on his own initiative accepts personal responsibility for them. The prole never. He appears on the historical scene only if he can function without responsibility, at the prompting of superiors. At such times, he puts on the fancy uniform, licks his lips, rolls up his shirt sleeves and goes to work contentedly and deliberately. This was how he appeared the year before on the balcony of this house in a green

shirt. This was how he now stood on that very same balcony in a spanking new field-gray uniform. He looked down on the crowd contentedly and cockily, like the expert who has at long last obtained work appropriate to his character and capacities, and can say: "God bless an honest trade."

17

Presumably, progressive intellectual highbrows also turned up in the crowd rushing by below the balcony in the late hours of the radiant spring afternoon. But when they passed by below the balcony, they did not look up; at most they cleared their throats and then hurriedly talked about something else. They acted like someone who doesn't know that there is no Communism without Terror, because a system without any human dimension can be forced on human beings only with inhumane methods. They acknowledged that there were still some "initial errors," but then – quickly, volubly – they spoke of other matters.

Communists were rarely found among progressive intellectuals. Rather, they were well-read, well-informed and educated individuals who saw in Communism nothing more than the chance to gain opportunities for themselves. Among them, the cynical toady who asked to be admitted into the Party was a rarity. The one who behaved in this manner invariably belonged to the more inferior type: the writer with the shallow talent and dubious character who, snuffling, made known to the Party Committee that he wanted to become a member and, with supercilious confidence, asked that they "scrutinize his past" and establish – with an objective consistency of principle – whether he was deserving of this honor. The Party Directorate hastened to meet his request with scornful politeness; in the early days, they awaited with open arms every-

one they could put to use. The writer with shallow talent and inferior character promptly obtained a role from the Party, and he could now stroll about in the literary arena with condescending, affable majesty; blinking, he basked in the warmth of the assumption that now he was the new Writer Prince – like dwarf Zoli the clown in the circus when he puts on a top hat and plays the giant.

The Communists, the out-and-out scoundrels – namely, the Hungarians who returned from Moscow – gazed with serene contentment upon the neophytes elbowing their way to curry favors. The progressives behaved as if they didn't know what Communism really is. It was as if they hadn't read the books – for example, Gide's recollections of Russia – the countless documents that disillusioned Western highbrows had published in the past decades on their experiences in the Soviet Union. The Communists, the "real ones" who knew what the reality was – they had, after all, spent bitter decades in constant peril of their lives in the Soviet Union – invited them in, rubbing their hands.

Alongside and among the cynical toadies were also found some old writers, artists and intellectual experts who at some time, thirty or even more years earlier, believed that Communism represented the consummation of the socialist idea. One of them – he was an outstanding writer, he wrote short prose pieces, biting sketches and immortalized the disgusting perversities of the streets in Pest, the cafés, the capitalist, petty bourgeois atmosphere with the sharp-sightedness of a Goya drawing – came toward me one fall morning in 1946 on the Boulevard. He was a neurotic, bald man. He could never make a living from his writings; his bitter humor rather repelled than attracted readers. Already an old man, he opened a bookstore on the Boulevard and barely managed to subsist on the income. It now seemed that the hour of personal gratifi-

cation and compensation had struck for him, too. This was why I was surprised when he said:

"There is trouble."

We weren't friends. But I always respected him because he was an outspoken, honorable man. I asked him what the "trouble" was. He looked around apprehensively and whispered hoarsely:

"The Chief has come home. They are now unexpectedly checking on everyone. They are asking what people did while they, the Chief and his staff, the Moscovites, were away. Look," he said confidentially, with bitter candor, "you have nothing to worry about. You are a bourgeois. If you wish, they'll put you on display, like an art relic. But I was a Communist, and I did nothing for twenty-five years. I sat in the Bucszinsky Café on the Boulevard, and sometimes, among intimates, I would say in whispers that things aren't good the way they are. Now the day of reckoning has arrived. It's very dangerous being a Communist," he said worriedly and then sighed.

I asked him why he thought that now, when the Communists are here, it is dangerous to be a Communist. He replied soberly:

"Didn't you read about it in the paper? The Communists announced that the time for social solidarity has come. Don't you see? The Communists will round up and throw into prison everybody they are down on in society. This is what they call social solidarity. I'm not happy about this," he said and sighed again.

Not all of the progressive intellectuals were as foresighted. They scurried to jockey for positions because by now all obstacles to success had vanished; all they had to do was to wait until the Russians marched out of the country, and then they, the progressives, would assume the leading role in the nation; they would become ministers, undersecretaries, ambassadors, chief editors, haloed writers, villa owners, and they would have automobiles. To the West, "the

staunch border guard" protected them – they composed verses to this, too. Of course, it would be good to leave some reliable Russian army corps on the border and to be able to summon Russian tanks into the country at the signal of a revolving door as soon as signs of ephemeral disturbances appeared. But otherwise, they, the progressives, after the liquidation of "reactionaries" and the withdrawal of the Communists, would receive the country as a gift.

Among them some turned up who were not taken with this prospect because they didn't trust the Russians. But most of them, after initial indecision and hesitation, presented themselves at a ministry and asked for a department because they knew better what and how matters should be handled than the longtime members of the staff did. They appeared in the university lecture hall, on the professor's platform, to rear, at last, the backward country in the progressive Marxist spirit. They went to the National Bank and assigned the "allowance" from the sparse reserve of foreign currency to serve the aims of literary propaganda channels abroad. Waving the flaming torch, they had put on the stage of the National Theater the cheap pamphlet, wrapped in popular silver paper, on whose title page they had had printed that it was a drama. This was the time of the careerists' striptease, the people's masked ball, the witches' sabbath termed Socialism – the age of weird changes, of undressings and dressings.

It is impossible for me to recollect when I first heard the definition of the conceptual category "these" applied to them. It was before the time of fear at the ringing of the doorbell, this is certain. The "coalition" still existed, and opposition newspapers were being published. Free enterprise was still functioning; splendid shop windows made a display on Váci Street; well-heeled guests dined at the level of peacetime in Buda and Pest restaurants. There were political parties, in-

cluding Communist subsidiaries rigged out with labels of independence, parties waving the shibboleths of "nation" and "peasant." The leader of one of these newly organized special parties was a peasant from the Alföld who years before had looked me up several times in the editorial offices of the liberal newspaper and expounded his political philosophy to me at great length. At that time, he evoked my sympathy because his origins lay in abject poverty and because he was intelligent and sincerely wanted to help the poor who were landless and wasting away in menial positions. He wrote articles and books, and he wasn't without talent. But he was pathologically voluble; in his writings, as well as in his conversations and speeches, he could, with the facility of a prayer wheel, mutter for hours marathon-like sentences until his listeners grew giddy. This man had now gained a position: he became one of the staunchest mamelukes of the government's "land distribution program," and the Communists coddled him because he served them, the Communists and the occupying Russian forces, with equal zeal. Near the end of 1946, I saw him once again, and for the last time. I didn't recognize him immediately because he had changed extraordinarily in his physical appearance. He had got fat; amidst the general wretchedness he had grown rotund, and he dressed himself up like a farmer, wearing his jacket thrown over his shoulders and sporting welteed top boots and a jerkin, looking like Kálmán Rózsahegyi when he played the bogus peasant in the National Theater on Sunday afternoons. In this costume, he took it upon himself to create the post of War Minister, the formation of this ministry taking even the progressives by surprise. Later, when the wagon ride became bumpy, he turned less bold, and toward the end of his life, in one of his longwinded speeches, he said with a sigh – with the nostalgic emphasis of lately acquired knowledge – that literary creativity "requires soul and talent."

The realization that "these" were more dangerous than those who joined the Party and pinned on its button burst from a people regaining their consciousness like a spark from gun wadding. What was the real motive behind this stampede? A French writer, Raymond Aron, called Marxism the "opiate of the intellectuals." Just as the Communists proclaimed that "religion is the opiate of the masses," so for the intelligentsia everything they brought together under the catchword "Marxism" constituted some kind of indigestible opium concoction. Communism was a fact, Communists were a reality. But what about "these"? Some later got off the dreamboat. They went to the West and explained there what it was that the Communists "were doing badly." But most of them stayed at home and accommodated themselves to opportunities opening up... People perceived that the Communists looked upon "these" as hired help, and they spoke with biting contempt about the auxiliary personnel of the Great Change. Certainly, well-meaning ones cropped up among "these," individuals who had suffered and lost much. And an individual can't be denied the right to ask for restitution when times change and the means of restitution are present. In Hungary, the "caricature" was ripe for criticism; but in a defeated and occupied country where the agents of a foreign power hustled, in behalf of that foreign power, to scrape together everything that was plunder for Moscow, the bustling readiness of the neophytes to help was more repugnant than the official zeal of the Communists.

Individuals who were persecuted for their lineage in the recent past, who went through every hell of human torture at the time of the Nazis and the Arrow Cross and somehow managed to escape with their lives, who in the idiotic and revolting gyration of the selection of the least fit from the Right and Left over two decades caught the worst of it — these individuals be-

haved like humans when they now sought a place in society for themselves. "Those" who behaved in this fashion were not always among "these". Persons differentiated between the two with an extraordinary sense of smell and keenness of sight. During the first two years, the years of Transition, I talked with many friends within four walls, confidentially. It was surprising how most of those I put the question to – among them colleagues who, because of their lineage, had suffered brutal persecution, traversed the Nazis' sites of torture and somehow managed to escape with their lives but whose closest family members perished in that mass murder beyond all imagination – knew precisely that what "these" kept denouncing was the reality but, at the same time, something different. True, the reality was horrible and unforgivable, but alongside the horror and the terror there was always something else as well: humaneness and solidarity. Those who returned from Hell behaved more moderately and passed judgment more impartially than "these," who most often only caught the edge of the storm and escaped more cheaply.

Gorky wrote this about them: "Among our intellectuals are many who constantly flaunt their sulkiness, like some business firm. They walk about with the mien of someone to whom humanity owes one ruble and fifty kopecks and doesn't want to discharge the obligation." He wrote this in Sorrento, where he lived from 1921 to 1930 in voluntary exile because he had become aware of the anti-human character and substance of Bolshevism. Later, he returned to Russia because he was a Russian writer and could not bear life abroad. He died in the Soviet Union in 1936; his contemporaries had reason to think that Stalin did away with him because this inspired witness was a thorn in his side. If one carefully reads the short stories Gorky wrote in exile, he doesn't feel that their supposition is preposterous. Official Soviet iconog-

raphy displays Gorky among its saints, wreathed with a red halo, and calls him the grand master of socialist realism. But this revolutionary fled to Sorrento from the results of the revolution. Gorky's flight was not caused by the panic of an offended and frightened intellectual struck with horror because the reality was different from what he imagined it would be. Gorky was indeed a realist; he didn't have any illusions about the essence of the revolution, of Socialism – neither earlier when he helped to realize it nor later when it was realized.

He knew the limits of his talent: he did not have Dostoevsky's imagination, nor Tolstoy's epical power, nor Chekhov's ear for irony, but he could describe reality faithfully and without self-deception. He had a thorough knowledge of his countrymen, the Russians. He quotes Turgenev in one of his stories: "The brain of the Russian always slips askew." (He understood "slips askew" in the sense of a hat on a tipsy fellow's head.) In a story entitled "Karamora," also written in Sorrento between 1922–1924, Gorky introduces a "revolutionary" who recognizes the true face of the intellectual romantics, the revolutionary toadies, and finally joins the czar's police as a spy; not for vengeance, not even for money or from cowardice, but simply because it made him aware of the fact that "man could also be vile." The revolution erupts, his former comrades imprison the informer and condemn him to death: he records his thoughts before his execution. He wrote this, for example: "I knew many Socialists to whom Socialism truly remained always something foreign. These individuals resembled calculators to which it made no difference what numbers they were using in their calculations. The final result was always correct. I will put up with this body politic while it is to my advantage. But once it is no longer so, I strike out on my own and say: 'Have a good time, comrades!'"

Another comrade, whom the hero of one of

Gorky's stories forces to hang himself because the Party doesn't trust him any longer, says to the executioner before the forced suicide: "Wherever war is waged, heroes are found on both sides." Later, Gorky wrote the following in Sorrento: "Perhaps the time has now come when it will be possible to commit every form of vileness and depravity, so that people will finally come to loathe and turn away from the wicked in horror and loathing and then suddenly all evil will end." The one who wrote this and then went back to Stalin's Russia saw clearly and knew what awaited him there, but he shouldered this destiny just as the hero of the story had his forced suicide.

The intentions of human beings, the feelings that motivate them can't be known perfectly. After all, most of them – most often – don't themselves know why they are behaving exactly as they are... Jules Renard wrote: "The big mistake of judges occurs when they take for granted that the accused behaved logically." It is possible that among "these" were also some who saw purpose and meaning beyond opportunities for momentary advancement in what came to pass in the occupied and bloodstained country. At this time – in 1946 and the succeeding years – Stalin and his collaborators – Beria, Khrushchev and the others – had already begun the new tide of "purges" in the Soviet Union. They interned in forced labor camps, penal colonies and prisons millions of those who had fought in the war in defense of their homeland, and thus, having served in the West and seen something "different," they were presumably discontented when, returning home, they compared conditions there with those in other civilizations, other systems. Military distinction, distinguished army records, wounds – all this did not save the returning, discharged Russian citizen from falling victim to the new "purges." Did "these" writers who were walking about affably and serenely in countries occupied or bolshevized by the salami technique

or some other way know what was going on in the Soviet Union? In Czechoslovakia – in the only European country to opt for Communism through a democratic, secret election – the Czech and Slovak writers required twenty years to compose the manifesto entitled “2000 Words” and admit that the system going by the name of Communism does not serve the interests of working people, intellectuals and peasants, but always only the advantage and defense of the Party and its favorites and pimps. The Ivan Denisovitches were already languishing in prisons by the millions – they were suffering sentences of ten, twenty, twenty-five years – when the cynical favorites – the “these” – of East European intellectuals in the Soviet and then in the Hungarian, Czech and other colonies – composed odes and novels lauding the Soviet in naive voices, declaimed on the radio, and, hoarse with zeal, asserted to the people at public meetings that prosperity would spring forth from social production. Maybe “these” didn’t read the writings of the exiled Gorky, but they must have known about the reality, the anti-human character of Communism; after all, it was there right before their eyes, in its palpable, daily version. But they didn’t want to know about anything else, only about the moment that brought advantage to them. They kept repeating the phrase “doing justice” like parrots. It seems they hadn’t read Nietzsche either, who, amidst the throes of his calculations, acknowledged that the one who seeks “justice” vociferously and obdurately doesn’t really want justice but revenge.

But the “engineers of the soul” believed that the Soviet – disregarding “the initial errors” – allotted them a role that the people would also gratefully acknowledge. Writers are popular in the Soviet – thus did the publicity of the intelligentsia trumpet – the Soviet people read gladly and much and are grateful – both the system and the readers – to the writers who “tell what the people are thinking,” as one of my Rus-

sian visitors at the time of the siege had put it. But this was the case because the people bearing the misery of Soviet life really expected answers from the "engineers of the soul" – answers to the painful problems of their lives. Before long, disappointment replaced their expectations. Twenty years later, in 1966, a deported Russian, a certain Marchenko (he wasn't a writer and possibly this was only a pseudonym) escaped after six years of camp life and two years of a prison sentence and wrote a book in which he recounted the sorts of experiences he garnered in the penal camps after Stalin's death, hence in the "liberal" and "humanized" time of Khrushchev. The book deserves attention because it wasn't written by a writer: it resembles a court deposition set down in shorthand. It tells what things are like when a "liberal" system commits atrocities. The Nazi camps were the institutionalized and systematized enterprises for human destruction of the preceding and subsequent Communist penal colonies, and the writers who sometimes lauded the system in enthusiastic and naive tones and composed odes to Stalin sometimes elatedly, with almost sexual ardor, and breathlessly eulogized the system's charms – didn't these writers know about these anti-human institutions?

Did the automobile, the apartment, the trips abroad, the splendid rake-offs of favoritism, the Role granted by the Party blur their awareness of what was going on in the Soviet Union? Marchenko set down that in 1966, thirteen years after Stalin's death and years after Khrushchev's downfall, Yuli Daniel was shipped to the camp where Marchenko had already been held captive for six years, the Russian writer whom the Soviet court had sentenced to five years of forced labor, together with his associate, Siniavsky, because they "had slandered the Soviet system." The news that a writer had arrived in the camp roused excitement among the deported, among whom were the "political"

prisoners – in short, the brave men who loudly criticized the Soviet – and the martyrs from the nationalist opposition, the Ukrainians and the Baltic citizens, and also common criminals. The deported who were made up of such various characteristics and different convictions responded with unusual emotion to the news that a “real writer” had finally come among them. “The inmates of the camp hated writers,” Marchenko writes, word for word. They hated them because the “engineers of the soul,” during the half century of Communist rule, were, with rare exceptions, silent about the horrors that characterized the internal regulation of Soviet life. It wasn’t only the Ehrenburgs, the official well-paid propagandists who kept silent but also all the others who, after Stalin’s death, during the time of the “thaw,” began, at official prompting, to criticize with timid throat-clearings and cautious shakings of the head what they had endorsed until then, but they knew that what had transpired could not be changed by subsequent poundings of the chest. They acted as if they didn’t know that a system that can survive only if it deprives individuals of their freedom of private ownership, enterprise, choice of employment, expression of opinion, writing and political attitude can not renounce despotism, because this is the only way despotism can hold on to power. When the talk turned to this, the “engineers of the soul” cleared their throats, smiled self-consciously and changed the subject.

But camp inmates, Marchenko notes, hated and scorned these writers. They also received Daniel in the camp with this expected hatred and distrust. This writer and his colleague, Siniavsky, had spoken their minds and protested the charges against them at a public trial. For propagandistic reasons, Brezhnev and his comrades thought, in 1966, that they would not have sentence passed on the two writers behind closed doors; they would, instead, stage the farce of a public trial for them. The camp inmates, however, didn’t be-

lieve in anything of this sort. In the Soviet Union, they said, there is no "public trial" because all such arranged trials are frauds; the accused are brought before the judge after due preparation, and judgments about them are made in the presence of an invited audience. Daniel later told his fellow victims that his trial was also such a Potemkin arrangement; only carefully selected journalists and a few family members and acquaintances were admitted into the hall, and the real, impartial public was excluded. Daniel was a Jew, and since anti-Semitism was, according to Marchenko, rampant in the camp, the inmates were waiting with mounting hatred for the time when someone from among "these" would finally arrive in their midst – in the midst of "those," the victims of the system that "these" helped make into a reality with their eloquent pens and winged words. Daniel arrived, and his behavior was so decent, sincere and humane that the antipathy toward him immediately abated and, yes, compassion enveloped him. Old politicians and weather-beaten thieves protected and helped him against the cruelties and villainies of the merciless system. And in this moment Daniel was no longer a "Jew" but one of the many with whom all felt solidarity.

But the Daniels are a rarity at all times. In 1946, in Budapest, "these" behaved like someone who didn't know what the Soviet reality was. Later, in their anxiety, they came to and began to criticize circumspectly – not Communism from which everything stemmed, not the Idea, but the individuals and methods that put the Idea into effect. People kept their eyes on them, glanced at each other and, shrugging their shoulders, said only: "These!"

Among the Communist writers who returned home from Moscow was one – an elderly man, a poet – with whom I once had the opportunity to exchange views frankly. He was a capable writer, thus a “gentleman” in Pascal’s sense of the word, because, so Pascal believed, “a gentleman does not undertake something he is not competent in.” This old poet was proficient in writing, but during the long decades of his exile in Moscow, he didn’t write anything significant. It was generally surprising how few important literary works emerged from their hiding place in the desk drawers at the moment when the written word no longer had to be kept concealed and the writer could stand before the world with what he thought and wrote in the years of relegation, oppression and banishment. The Hungarian writers who came home from exile in Moscow didn’t carry any worthwhile creations whatsoever in their intellectual luggage. This old poet didn’t bring home anything of value from Moscow either. But he had his intelligence with him; he remained a critic. And the only long conversation I had with him lived on in my memory like a gift.

At the beginning of our conversation, rattling on and bored, he muttered the parrot text he learned in Moscow. The paltry Communist vocabulary makes you yawn with boredom. Like the casual missionaries with the conditioned holy scriptures, he parroted the line that literature, art, intellectual creativity are never more than “the product of social circumstances.” I asked him how then would he explain the origins of those classical and half-classical masterpieces which, despite the ideas and tastes of an age and social and official censorship, materialized independently of the social provisos prevailing in their times? The artist, in every age, could always be stronger than the social conditions in which he lived... The Communist writer de-

nied this. The creative being can respond with creative works only at the stimulation of social forces, he repeated obstinately. He didn't say what the Soviet bridge-building soldier had told me in the village, that "revolution is so great a venture that the writer can renounce intellectual freedom," but listlessly and resignedly, he repeated the well-known, tedious dogma of the Holy Text. This was how our dialogue began.

But there are some dialogues that begin normally, and then the topic under debate inflames the platitudes. After a little while, we both sensed we were no longer "conversing" but squaring an account about something. And both of us felt it urgent for us to settle that account finally: the writer back from exile, the "victor," and I who lived at home during the years he spent in exile. For this reason, we were suddenly talking about basic issues, like persons rejoicing at finally coming across a partner worthy of engaging in this reckoning.

We spoke about how exile presents writers, not only with danger but – in times and situations that repudiate liberty and justice – with an opportunity as well. In such periods, one must go into exile voluntarily because only thus is it possible to express the truth. Otherwise, writing has no meaning. The old writer agreed: exile is an enormous trial but also a source of energy, a point we affirmed repeatedly. We cited examples. Lenin in Switzerland with unflagging inner energy and conviction amidst miserable circumstances. Victor Hugo in Jersey for thirty years, Marx in London and Voltaire in London, Potsdam and Ferney for thirty years. I reminded him that Voltaire wrote in Ferney, where he went into exile from Paris, that the writer can live only in a free country; otherwise, he has to resign himself to becoming a timid slave whom his fellow slaves eye jealously and enviously and denounce to the tyrant. He endorsed this view, and we agreed that there could be no literature

without freedom, and the returned exile gravely asserted that this is true, this was, after all, why he went to the Soviet Union a quarter of a century ago; only there could a Communist freely express his opinions in writing. This blunt statement took me by surprise because by then there was knowledge abroad about the freedom of writers as it was interpreted in the Soviet. I didn't want to offend him, and so when he flung out this statement in a monotonous tone, a short silence ensued. In sum, I replied that Soviet freedom could be a reality for someone who is a Communist but that freedom can be only absolute and indivisible – thus true freedom – if it also applies to those who don't happen to be Communists. For instance, what is the truth to him may not be the truth to me. This phase of our conversation remained in my memory because we both said the same thing but from opposite banks of the same river.

We agreed that advocates of various violent systems can hedge on whatever they wish; those who are unwilling to pay the enormously great price of freedom and remain under tyranny – under which they are granted, at most, only a sort of tactically circumscribed, illusory freedom – become crippled in that world. He said – quietly but with the emphasis of a truism – that he had paid this enormous price. Inasmuch as – at that time – I had not yet paid the price, I was silent.

But he stubbornly returned to the subject of “freedom.” Because it disturbed him? Because he knew that the enormous price he had paid – he left the sphere, the atmosphere of his mother tongue, the highest price a writer can pay – went for naught – he didn't find freedom in exile? In the end, this Hungarian poet returned from thirty years of exile in the Soviet Union and had experienced the reality there: that so-called “freedom” which the Communist system granted him. He hadn't come to know Communism through books

as had some of the local Hungarian literary highbrows who when the political dam burst after the siege – forgetting their peacetime pedagogical, explanatory readings – scurried breathlessly to push the Communists' wagon. This man lived through the purges, he saw his comrades-in-exile disappear in camps and places of execution. Yet now, when our conversation heated up, he persisted in asserting that "freedom" for the writer lies in Communism – hence, not just in the sense that he can freely extol the Idea or freely criticize those who err in tactical versions of the methods of the Idea, but "free" because Communism liberates mankind from the slavery of social class differences, and finally, when the Idea has "materialized," the State disappears, and a free classless society exists.

Our conversation was interesting to me because he was a poet. When he shouldered the mendicancy of exile, he wasn't seeking a career for himself; he wanted to be a poet expressing his poetic individuality freely. (Lenin read a book of poetry by Mayakovsky, who committed suicide, and then, whispering and shrugging his shoulders, he said to Trotsky: "I like Pushkin better.") This poet, the exile, had experienced the pedantic acts of terror that suffocate intellectually creative individuals in the Soviet Union. What had happened to this man who came from "yonder"? Why was he afraid to admit that there is no freedom for the intellectually creative being in the Soviet Union? Why did he keep mouthing and reiterating the ideological dogma? Now, when for the first and last time I not only "chatted" with someone who came from "yonder," but, it seemed, we talked candidly, I would have liked to find out what he was afraid of when his replies were so doctrinally and distinctly in harmony with the Party line. Clearly, the conversation interested him, too; it was the joy of a starved person who, after ideological Yeshiva, finally comes upon a partner, a debating colleague who asks and answers candidly. He was

old; every illusion of life had leached from him (he died in the third year following our conversation.) Did he fear that the invisible but ever hearkening, snooping Soviet inquisition would some time call him to account for this conversation, too?

Did we discuss literature? What literature is? The "pulse of mystical palpitation" that Novalis spoke of? The Goethean "harmony" in which everything blends together, matter and spirit, in blissful alchemy? The "tension," the passion that grows more and more refined through work, through expression? He said the time is past for the writer, too, when a contemporary still had the means of turning against social change adroitly, rationally or artfully. In reply, I said something like this: maybe in this overcrowded world, the nationalization of industrial energy is necessary, and maybe the nationalization of the means of distributing the benefits produced by workers' hands is also essential. But what cannot be condoned is the nationalization of human beings. What is intolerable is the nationalization of the spirit. The poetic, literary vision affects the subject matter, society, too; it is reflected in the theme, in the experience: it is not the experience that comes first but the vision that reacts upon life and gives shape to it. He said, but with an unsteady voice, that this was a romantic, a pre-socialist assumption. When I cited Renan's view that "only the truth can be revolutionary," he took note. For a moment the hoary scribe, the poet, looked at me. Every poet is a mystic; otherwise he is not a poet, only a rhymster. But there are mystics who don't have a god (Valéry was one). And they long eternally for a divinity who signifies intelligence in the Universe.

The gleam that flashed in his eyes at the mention of "truth" quickly flickered out. Again the disciplined, dialectical man spoke about how Communism is the absolute truth and every other partial truth follows from it. I asked him whether he didn't think that

now, when the Soviet stood before the world in the triumphant security of a great power, the time of which Huizinga speaks had also arrived for writers and artists when in "the waning of the Middle Ages," the artist wants to see the truth, the many-hued reality of the world in place of scholastic visions. (Our conversation took place at the end of 1945, hence the period when "the waning of the Middle Ages" was dawning wanly in the Soviet Union; after all, the ideological terror of Stalin and Zhdanov was still rife.) He didn't answer the question, he began speaking of something else. Communism is a revolution, he repeated, and a revolution makes mistakes, has its victorious and difficult phases; but the Communist revolution will not cease to exist as long as the world fails to perceive the verity of the "consolidated revolution" that Lenin promulgated.

I asked him whether it was possible for a person to remain silent in the Soviet Union. In the long run, silence is also one of the rights of freedom wherever freedom exists. He looked at me distrustfully and answered warily. In the Soviet Union no need for silence exists, he said, and, besides, the reason *why* someone is silent is not vitally important, only what he is silent *about*. To the question of whether he believed in the possibility of humanizing the revolution, he replied that this is not the task of the revolution, that the greatest transitional phase of humanization can be found in the consolidated revolution itself which, like the ocean, continually decontaminates itself, no matter what is thrown into it. We got no further; the conversation started to bog down in stagnant dialectical banalities.

I began to suspect that the poet had withered away in him. The retired revolutionary remained, the *sansculotte en retraite*, the superannuated veteran who returned home after many hardships and wanted to spend his twilight years in peace and comfort. This

was understandable, but a poet cannot renounce for a pension handout that restlessness which gives significance to his life and work, that compulsion to give voice to the truth in artistic form. We said goodbye. The discussion no longer had any meaning. But the memory of this encounter sometimes recurred because this old Communist poet was the only one of the returnees whom the standard classification of "exile" did not fit. Later, after two decades, when the great religious schism built bonfires in the West, and it was not just sensation-starved magazines that proclaimed on colorful covers that "God is dead," there sometimes appeared a rare and fascinating human phenomenon in the procession of heretics, sectarians and apostates: the atheistic priest.

The priest who does not divest himself of his clerical garb, resign from the denomination, or preach atheism. He remains a priest, performs his clerical duties correctly, gives confession and holds mass, preserves the secrets of confession and delivers sermons. And thus, without any sign of conflict, he lives out his life in priestly status, takes extreme unction and goes to his grave with the blessing of the church. Why? Because he once swore to uphold something. And then, when he learned that the God to whom he made his vows is nowhere to be found, he could not abjure that vow. He remained a priest.

Something of this sort is also present in the Communists' immanent theological system. There are faithful Communists who one day find out that the divinity in whom they had placed their belief does not exist anywhere. Their response to this staggering discovery varies. Some perform the melodrama beginning with "spit in my face, friend," and make confessions in keeping with the standard norms of Russian novels. Others become "exes" who look on their disappointments as existential reassurance, cross over to the opposite shore, and there teach with diligent zeal what

was evil in what they did when they were Communists to those who never were Communists. The "exes" never understand the atheistic Communist who doesn't believe in anything but stays in place, though he already knows he erred when he took his vows. (Because there are individuals who take an oath only once in their lifetime.) For this reason he stays in the Party, discharges the Party duties entrusted to him and doesn't cast blame on the methods or persons, and when he becomes an atheist, he doesn't disparage anyone – he disparages mostly himself, because he can't ever forgive himself for not having had the strength to create the God who – he now knows – doesn't exist anywhere. There have always been individuals who believed they were chosen to create God, and then – sometimes astounded, sometimes shuddering – realized that they didn't have the power to do it. They discovered that Communism can become a reality only by evoking an immanent, false image of God. Just as religions, when they identify themselves with prevailing systems of power, tried to curb the stimulus for the free generation of opinions dangerous to them, so are the current economic and political power systems the enemies of free thought in the age of the masses – Communism or the post-industrial consumer civilization – when they have done everything to keep the human masses – as religions did earlier, in a state of puerility by conditioning them with the methods of terror or those of technical civilization. There always were founders of religion who made people believe that God created man in His own image and did not acknowledge that in reality, man created God in his own image. There are such atheistic priests. And there are also such Communists. Perhaps not just a few... I saw one of them.

The expertly trained Hungarian Communists who arrived on the hay racks of the Russian war wagons – there wasn't a single "atheist" among them, all of them being selected orthodox party members – embarked on their work with ironically amiable politeness. They had learned in the Soviet Union that ideological passions do not operate in Bolshevik politics; instead, a cool, calm grand plan moving tectonically forms rings. Somewhere in the Kremlin, in its innumerable offices, there was a "Hungarian bureau," just as there was a Bulgarian, Rumanian, Yugoslavian, Finnish, German bureau and naturally a Korean, Indo-Chinese, Indian and Chinese bureau, and – on the floors more to the rear – an Italian, French, Norwegian and South American bureau. Extraordinarily well-trained officials sat in these offices, Soviet *tchinovniks* who went to the office in the morning and, yawning, pulled out some drawer of a filing cabinet, took out a document, and, pencil in hand, began to work. One day it was the "Bulgarian conspiracy" that had to be disposed of; and when the official inscribed the mark on the document with a red or blue pencil, it took on life in the world, and a week or a year later, Petkov was hanged.

Hungarian "land distribution" or the "nationalization" of industries, banks and commerce was such a document on file in one of the offices; the Kremlin's official prepared the document and dispatched it to the registrar, which was then, when its time came, forwarded to Budapest, where another official took it over and passed it on – with orders for execution – to the previously posted Hungarian-speaking Communists, who, at the proper time, set about putting the plan into force. And Hungarian society, which was waiting for the end of the "transitional period" with optimism, one day read in the newspaper that, in accord-

ance with a "Cabinet Decree," they no longer owned the estates that their ancestors had cultivated, the industrial companies that their grandparents had created; that they no longer owned the houses in which they lived, had no right to the positions they secured with a diploma, ability and diligence, and that their opinions weren't theirs because their souls weren't theirs either.

When Hungarian society also found this out – the Kremlin's official drew the document on the nationalization of the "soul" out of the drawer last – it went into a panic, for it is not possible to live in a system that destroys the human conscience. The official in the Kremlin nodded at this news – because this possibility was anticipated in the bundle of documents just as every other possibility the human brain can conceive was – pulled the act out of the secret drawer and reasigned it as "urgent." Then he sent this document to Pest, too, precisely as the executive order stipulated; later, the appropriate officials also "attended" to this one.

The individuals sent to Hungary from Moscow behaved – at first amiably, later cynically, always consistently – like missionaries carrying out their task in a wild region: they were sent to Hungary to force a pagan people to repent and accept the only redeeming, victorious world religion, Communism. Historiography knows that a thousand years ago, when the news spread that the Hungarians received baptism, droves of official and exceedingly more unofficial missionaries overran Hungary. Many of them came from the city of Mainz, where, in the ninth century, a deacon named Benedict the Levite organized the irregulars of the *propaganda fide* of the time who smuggled into the mission's territory not only the fixed religious statutes of the Catechism but also the statutory provisions of the Frankish Empire. They didn't bring much else, because the majority of them were rabble, destitute ad-

venturers; priests imbued with a sense of calling did, of course, turn up among the missionaries, but the bulk were a dirty lot who saw the opportunities for adventure, begging and thievery in the missionary enterprise. A thousand years later, this missionary work was repeated in a heathen version, with the difference that no one summoned the Communist missionaries arriving belatedly from Moscow in Hungary. They arrived in the wake of the Red Army, slovenly, staff in hand, their only luggage a little bundle.

They began by pumping hands. We have arrived, they said, grinning broadly and greeting everyone with *drastvuitye*. They were hungry and shabby. They spruced up quickly and began to eat, smacking their lips, and to drive cars, showing off. Within a few months after their arrival, they were already living as puffed up as they had never dared to dream during the decades spent in the dire poverty of Communism. They moved into abandoned middle-class dwellings; they took over key positions. One of them proselytized Socialist workers to "unite" with the Communists, another the peasants by dangling the carrot of nationalization called "land reform" in front of them. These missionaries – as special agents had the alien-spirited, alien-minded regulations of the *Collectio Capitularium* a thousand years before – smuggled the promises of mendacious illusions into the general consciousness of Hungarians. They knew what "land reform" meant in Soviet reality; after all, they were eyewitnesses when, on orders from the Kremlin, the requisitioning squads slaughtered the German settlers along the Volga – and the Kulaks everywhere in the vast empire; they knew everything from personal experience, they observed the tragedy of the "conversion" of the peasants on the spot. Others of them "evangelized" university students; they appeared uninvited on university podiums and expounded the dogma that philosophy, literature and aesthetics, everything the

human spirit created in the West through two thousand years would now be comprehensible only through the Marxist way of viewing things. They knew what Viktor Chernov, one of Lenin's associates in the Revolution, later formulated, that "Lenin loved the proletarian but with the same despotic, unmerciful love as centuries earlier Torquemada, the Grand Inquisitor, did the Christians he sent to the stake to 'save their souls.'" They evangelized – and not without success – writers and journalists. They "re-educated" staff members of the Socialist newspapers in courses of instruction for papers edited in the spirit of Communism. Aged Socialist journalists diligently attended classes and listened to the tenets expatiating for them how Marxism became Leninism. To miss a seminar constituted a grave error, and the legitimacy of the absence had to be supported by a medical permit. At first, these spiritual exercises in ideology enraged long-standing Socialist pen-pushers, but they very soon broke down and gave up, because they came to understand that the Doctrine had taken their rebelling into account, and they were helpless. To the question of who the lecturers were, an old pupil replied sadly: "*Bocher* types". (Just as there were types of shoes, types of meals.)

It didn't take long for Hungarian society to see that the missionaries, the hypocritical, evangelizing newcomers were, in reality, the harbingers of colonizers: as had already so frequently occurred in the history of colonization, the power intent on taking a territory under its control by force and intrigue first dispatched missionaries there who carried the Cross around, promising Divine Grace. Then, without warning, the armed colonizers appeared in the wake of the missionaries and began looting ruthlessly. Here and now, the colonizing Eastern power was subsisting on the very same methods.

Hungarian society understood that the State

had turned into a hostile power against which the people had to protect themselves in every way possible. This so-called "State" that the Communists threw together with panting zeal was not the reality in the cohesive sense of the word: everything was fluid, nothing had a backbone; everything was gelatinous, sphere and function. Laws and regulations no longer had actual validity, and law can exist only where law provides protection, not just attack. People saw that law no longer protected them; it just issued an order and took away what belonged to them. This was why they began living in a state of constant self-defense. They defended themselves against the State as best they could, because it was evident that society had reached the epoch of institutionalized banditry.

People saw the missionaries gathering up the books that the system considered undesirable and locking them up in cellars; the moment inevitably follows when the authors of the undesirable books are also locked up in cellars. And then come the readers who read undesirable books and so on, very logically.

But during the first two years, the missionaries were still cautious, because they knew that this evangelistic colonization, this lucrative fieldwork could be conducted only while they enjoyed the Red Army's protection. In any event, they hurriedly began to imitate everything that was repugnant in the old social hierarchy. For instance, they started to hunt. Now, hunting is an ancient, manly pursuit, but when the news appeared in the papers that the Communists who returned from Moscow had organized a battue in the Bakony and the Mátra, Hungarian readers took note, because the super-baroque battue-hunt was a mark of the New Class's conquest. And this New Class assumed the privileges of the Old Class with meticulous, pompous formality. The use of "thou," for instance. The Hungarian use of "thou" was one of the peculiar, distorted oddities of a past society. The peasants didn't

use the "thou" among themselves, just the old with the younger ones; workers didn't use it either. The "genteel" used the "thou"; indeed, among them it was an affront if one "gentleman" didn't address another totally unknown "gentleman" as "thou." Naturally, middle-class Christians "theed" and "thoued" differently, and so did the Jews, but it did happen that the Jewish chief councilor to the prime minister, who lived in an apartment house with Christian councilors to ministers, was all ears in the elevator, on the way to the office, in case a "thouing" or "theeing" dropped on him between two floors, enabling him to report the office: "I presented to my friend, His Lordship X, my plan for the electrification of Veszprém, and do you know what he replied? He said, 'Thou art right, Rezső. I'll call His Excellency's attention to thy plan.'" The significance of the familiar pronoun was that the one who used it and the one so addressed both belonged to the "Privileged Class." But when it came to the janitor, who sometimes was as fine a human being and Hungarian as the chief councilor to the prime minister and the ministerial councilor, not one of them "thoued" him because, well, there was no reason to. He didn't belong to their class.

The missionaries of the New Class "thou'd and thee'd" and called each other by nicknames; they publicly called each other Matyi and Zoli. The so-called "100 000 persons," whom Czech intellectuals designated as the business federation allies of the Communists in a famous memorandum twenty years later, hurried eagerly to fraternize with the couple of hundred who arrived from Moscow with the mandate, in addition to other items on the agenda, to organize this trustworthy cadre. (Possibly, the number is not quite accurate; but it is likely that the estimated component is largely correct. Always – even in societies with a large population – the number of those who are by no means "Communists" but who attach themselves to

the Communists for rake-offs and favors, out of hunger for a position, out of vanity, greed or desire for revenge amounts to about 100 000. And everywhere they are permitted to dip into the meat pot.)

Who were these proselytes? Three characteristic types could be detected. First of all, the Faithful Progressives, who believed in the Idea. Not even all the lessons of several decades of Soviet history convinced them that the Idea was obsolete and anti-human, that new systems of production, distribution and ownership had since developed in the world which were able to help the working masses more quickly and fairly than the hundred-year-old Idea dictated. They, the single-text individuals, believed in the Idea with a tenacious, shortsighted and anti-intellectual obstinacy; they did not want any debate or counter-arguments; they turned away if someone held up to them the reality proving that in the age of mass growth, industrial revolution, and earth-shaking technological changes, Communistic theory, responding to the phenomena of the preceding century of monopolistic capitalism, was obsolete and meaningless. They didn't want to know about anything that materialized with such uncanny rapidity in the twentieth century because they wanted to believe in the Holy Scripture of outworn parchments smuggled through the nineteenth century, in the Idea. These spiritually impoverished who took it for gospel that the Kingdom of Heaven was theirs were not great in number but, in the long run, imbeciles are always found everywhere, and they can be dangerous when they cast their lot with Authority.

Then there were the cynical, overbearing fellow travelers who weren't imbeciles when they admitted: "I know what this banditry is; I know it's not for the benefit of the working masses that they deprive men of the rights to private ownership and free enterprise and political and intellectual freedom; it is, rather,

through this pretext that they bring into existence the primitive economic system which provides the opportunity for a cynical and overbearing minority to live well without any exertion of character or talent on their part. Possibly, it will come to a bad end because the undertaking is inhumane, but it will do for me. Well then, *davai*, come, I'll join them."

These were more numerous than the imbeciles, but they didn't make up the majority either. The great bulk of the auxiliary army of the hundreds of thousands who joined up with the Communists – not just in countries the Communists attacked with armed force or some arbitrary stratagem but in other places and everywhere in the free West – consisted of neurotic intellectuals who never dread anything more than the danger of being compelled to remain alone with their neuroses in the maelstrom of radical change. The neurotics who repair to the Party because they can't and don't dare to remain alone, who "have to belong somewhere," who relax only when they can wrap themselves up in a piece of the magic cloak and don the current social and ideological uniform. Just as there are neuropaths given to fits of fury who immediately calm down when they can dress in the nurse's white smock or put on the soldier's uniform or a monk's cowl, so do they relax because in the moment when they are protected by a secular or monastic uniform, they are no longer alone with the fearsome responsibilities of the human personality.

The neurotics who push themselves forward whimperingly because "belonging somewhere" is their sole source of relief formed the bulk of the auxiliary army of the hundred thousand. The old, orthodox, trained Communists knew this, and they encouraged the auxiliary forces affably, egged them on and kept inviting them in, "theeing" and "thouing" them. Later, during the gang wars, they cut the throats of most of them because dictatorial systems don't trust anyone,

and they aren't so relentless, so merciless with anyone as they are with those fellow travelers who did not "pay into the account" in the past but showed up later, wanting to cash in and achieve their goals. The "union" that the Communists tendered – the opening round in the extermination of the intellectual and leadership echelon of the Social Democrats – this trap was one of the logical transmittals of their ruthless hatred. The workers looked on aghast as an intimidated or pushily role-hungry group of Social Democrats agreed to the castration of the only organization able to defend the workers, the trade union.

The united New Class had already begun to appear before the public socially – its members gave parties, they put themselves on display in proscenium stage-boxes at gala performances at the Opera House. Air bombs and shells had pulverized the National Casino, that citadel of unhappy memories for the Hungarian aristocracy; but the New Casino shortly opened, whose members came from the upper two hundred chosen from the hundred thousand, hence the Communist élite and the Socialists who "united" with them and then writers, journalists and artists who didn't dare to turn down the gracious invitation or elbowed their way for admittance into the New Casino's chambers, which were abundantly packed with everything good and delightful.

Quickly, within just a few months, the new caricature materialized in the wake of the caricature of the old social hierarchy that had been destroyed: the Exclusive Party Casino took the place of the National Casino, and the puffed-up, mooching *arrivistes*, the pocket-sized undersecretaries and the minipotentates supplanted the lazy counts and the swaggerers of the idle plutocracy. Ady ridiculed the privileged class of old Hungary as the homunculi of the moment; these new notables greedily hurried to participate, to stuff their pockets and bellies because they were only men

of the second who knew it is expedient to measure the time span of their prospects with a stopwatch. They knew that the Lent of the Red Carnival could arrive for them at any instant: they feared not their adversaries of the destroyed past but their patrons, the Communists. The fellow traveler who "with his upholding of principle" but his splitting the take with the Mafia is, in the end, always the first to be put out of the way when the Mafia no longer needs him. And Mafia battles are frequently more bloody and ruthless than regular clashes.

I was talking with one of these fellow travelers on the morning when – in the spring of 1948 – the Red radio in Pest first began blasting "Tito's chained dogs." He looked me up at my home. He was pale. "This is the worst disaster that could strike Socialism," he stammered. The great break, the schism in the Communist world would become public on this day. Stalin issued the command to commence a war of extermination against Tito and everyone who wanted to be free and independent of Moscow's supremacy, of its despotic authority. My visitor had behaved admirably during the Nazi period when, because of his lineage and convictions, he, too, had shared the fate of the persecuted: he courageously rescued innocent victims, and now when the time came, he was helping, just as bravely and humanely, everyone in the danger zone of the Red terror who needed his assistance. He was a Social Democrat, and was entrusted with the editorship of a Socialist daily. When the Communists announced the "union," he could not protect himself from the terror; gnashing his teeth and filled with loathing, he stood on the platform and "united." He knew this undertaking was a form of oral suicide, but he could not shield himself against it. "This is a tragedy," he stammered.

I accompanied him to the street. A sign was posted at the corner; it depicted Tito, the bemedaled, fat-chested Balkan general in a dress uniform who a

few weeks earlier had visited Budapest and was welcomed with a big parade. We looked at the weather-worn wall poster. I asked him what he thought, what are the Communist furnishings shipped home from Moscow like? Are there any "gentlemen" among them? My visitor, an intelligent man, immediately understood what I was driving at. The "gentleman" is a rare human phenomenon in every society – not the escutcheoned, monocled, grandstanding club member but the one who, regardless of his social position, knows the motto of the Prince of Wales's coat-of-arms: "Ich dien." And he has heard of the Samurai rule that commands: "Keep your word even if you have given it to a dog." (This kind of "gentleman" is always rare, but some turned up in Hungary, too.) My acquaintance reflected. Then, gloomily, he declared:

"Gentlemen? Among these? Not a one."

He stated this as categorically as Mencken, the American essayist who in the thirties bitterly asserted in one of his studies that "you can't work with the Communists because there isn't a *gentleman* among them." I asked him, if this was true, then why did he collaborate with them?

"Because I am a politician," he said. "And you cannot conduct politics with gentlemen." He went away palely, back to the editorial offices of the Socialist paper, to "unite." Shortly afterwards, at the time of the Rajk case, he was arrested, and the Communist court of martial law sentenced him to seven years in prison.

20

*"... Like the gambler who has lost at poker
Searches for a gun in the pocket of his dress
trousers*

*To pay a gentleman's debt, when a voice cries:
'Not yet!...'
Sit back, reflect upon the world.
What is left? The moon, China, the fjords –
Threadbare and dying, Saint Francis was
happy –
You lost, stand up and take your leave.
Once again you can lift your eyes to the star..."*

21

But where was this Star? I saw no guiding star either in the heavens or on earth. Many things "happened" every day. And one day I sensed with shock that something was "happening" to me, too: I sensed I was apathetic.

Apathy is very dangerous. It is amoral and anti-life. Until then I had never in my life been apathetic. I lived through one thing and another in my own way. But I never knew apathy. I looked at myself, then I looked around and wondered what had happened to me.

Only later did I understand I was apathetic because a generalized depravity, a stupid and mulish lack of integrity encompassed me. Nothing is so apathetic as sin. "*Satan est pur*," wrote Maritain. Yes, Satan is "pure" because he doesn't lie: the only thing he wants is Sin. But Sin is stupid and apathetic.

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PART THREE

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*"There is a grain of madness in every
separation"*

Goethe

An invitation from abroad in the winter of 1946 presented me with the opportunity to travel to Switzerland and from there to Italy and Paris. It was a group invitation – at the time it was difficult for ordinary mortals to go abroad in any other way – but I accepted it because I felt an urgent need for a change of air. Six of us traveled together, one less than the seven wicked: my companions consisted of two painters, a sculptor, a folk poet, and a cultured, literature-loving college teacher. In Switzerland, the members of the party split up, each heading off to find his own, personal Europe.

For me this journey was a cold, shivery ordeal. In the second year after the war, Europe had a snarling guilty conscience. In Switzerland, the choleric abundance induced the traveler venturing forth from the ruins of Eastern Europe to retch. The Swiss border guard scrutinized our Hungarian passports with very hostile suspicion, as if every traveler coming from that region was a spy, currency smuggler, Communist agent or drug trafficker. (Or more simply, a disease carrier, and sometimes there was some truth in this mistrustful supposition.) Yet, once again here was Switzerland, the abundance of a magically spread table, in tangible reality: the brightly lighted streets, the artistically designed watches in the shop windows, the bicycles parked heedlessly along the sidewalks... and the traveler arriving from the other side of the Iron Curtain was forced to think about what a Russian would give to catch a glimpse of the opportunities for looting that this fabulously lavish display presented. This was the neutral Switzerland that stood fast with honor amid great dangers and temptations, and the traveler who came from "over there" listened, hemming-and-hawing, to the Swiss's confidential rendering of accounts, to the effect that everything and

everyone here wasn't as above reproach as it appeared on surface, that those who dickered with the Nazis were found here, too. But how could that matter when this little country as a whole remained faithful to neutrality and the ideals of national autonomy so bravely and consistently? I strolled the streets of Zurich and Geneva and occasionally glanced around, blinking respectfully: You see, it is possible for a small nation to stand fast honorably in a grave geopolitical situation.

Still, everything considered, there was something improbable and wonderful about this trip. Here I was in Western Europe again! I had survived the war, crawled out of the pit, out of the shame, and, despite it all, I was in Western Europe once again! As long ago, I was traveling again at every opportunity; and it came to me that there was a time when I, conceitedly, maintained that the real significance of traveling lay not in the arrival but in the journey. (Now, after the historical detention, moments cropped up along the way when I felt that the change of place was not important, nor even the arrival, nor when the train is departing and what its destination is, but solely what sets out within us during the journey. At the same time, a certain quandary, a sickening ignorance accompanied me on this trip, and never left me along the way: Was it worth setting out once again to tamper with, to disturb that extraordinary indifference, that quietude of several years into which many things that formerly seemed important had already sunk?)

Like water in a puddle reacting to the course of the wind with quickly ruffling waves, I sometimes shivered and strolled with a goose-pimply repugnance the lovely, clean Swiss streets undamaged and lined with every worldly good. It was gratifying to encounter the businessman again; I doffed my hat to him, because at home I already missed the presence of this phenomenon. Every social system – thus the so-called socialist system, too – is helpless without the business-

man, and the biggest mistake of Eastern Socialism occurs when it declares a military crusade against the "profit-hungry businessman," excludes the independent middleman of business from society, and wants to replace him with state employees who are bureaucrats, lazy, often corrupt, and always laggardly and incompetent because they cannot foster demands in the consuming masses, and without demand social development cannot take place: the typical businessman who forces the buyer to accept typical goods is not a businessman, he is a general retailer. But now, here at last, face to face stood the smiling and courteous Swiss businessman who didn't want to force shoddy goods on the uninformed customer; he offered quality and variety instead. I made my selections from the stack of goods, and incidentally but respectfully thought about the ancestors of the businessman, about the Venetian merchants who launched the barter-in-kind modern chainstore at great risk and thus with large mark-ups, about the Lübeck businessman who invented the bill of exchange and no longer trotted off personally to the Novgorod fair. After the spasmodic rigidity of the Scholastic Middle Ages, it was not only the humanists burned at the stake but also the businessmen who helped to make the new Europe a reality. Behind the tragically contorted face of Giordano Bruno appeared, in the European sphere, the wily visage of Jacques Coeur, the businessman in Bruges, as he pottered about behind the counter. And now this visage once again looked at the customer who happened to wander into the shops in Zurich and Geneva. I reciprocated the gracious offering with grateful readiness and quickly bought an electric razor.

I didn't feel at home in Switzerland. At the same time, flashes of consciousness constantly reminded me that something still bound me to this sterile, cadaverous-smelling, so to speak, "formalized" Europe. Dostoevsky vociferously urged his

countrymen not to embrace Europe because sooner or later they would contract an infection from a corpse. Well, now they are embracing, I thought with mordant satisfaction. (When he visited Stalin in Moscow, a Swiss minister named Schuman noted that during their conversation, the Russian dictator examined a map of Europe and Asia, then laid his palm on Europe and said regretfully: "How small Europe is!..." He didn't say this sarcastically, but rather in an earnest, business-like manner.) What was it that drew, that bound me here, the fringe European? (And was I truly European, like a Swiss? A Frenchman? A German? Wasn't there distrust and caution in our European nostalgia as we lived at home beyond every approach, beyond the struggle of sometimes valiant generations?) "What binds me here?" I thought, and I bought myself a ballpoint, a new type of fountain pen. Memories of a civilization "dying out"? These are mere words. But perhaps it was the memory of collective crimes – the consciousness that we were all guilty, Europeans, Easterners and Westerners, because we lived here and tolerated, allowed everything to reach the point it did. In this realization there was also a sense of being an accomplice, more real than every other feeling and illusion; we were guilty because we were Europeans and we tolerated the destruction of "humanism" in the consciousness of European man.

For – so I felt then and often thereafter – this was Europe's great gift to mankind's domain: "humanism." The concept had an ideological flavor, it gave off the smell of libraries. There were great cultures, remote civilizations that created moral and metaphysical concepts of the universe, but only in Europe was humanism a living imperative shaping life, human destiny, intellectual attitudes and social coexistence. What is "humanism"? The measure of man. It holds that the individual is the measure of all things. The individual is the significant element of development. (If

indeed there is such a thing as "development" – if it is at all possible for man to rule over the instincts he brought with him from the cave.) The human attitude which does not hope for a supernatural reply to the problem of death and does not expect solutions to human problems from superhuman powers: a two-legged mammal abandoned and shaped by blind, accidental will in an indifferent and hostile universe, man is the only living creature who can find his way in the world independently of his instincts. The "human" was missing now. It was this that perished in Europe. (Where did it perish? In the gas chambers at Auschwitz, in the mass grave at Katyn, in the hell of Russian and German prison camps, or in the ruins of Dresden and Coventry, in the thickets of the Maquis? All such questions are rhetorical, purely nominal questions.) But the feeling that something was missing was real.

Walking the well-swept Swiss streets adorned with resplendent displays I felt like someone who had been robbed. As if I should check my pocket to see if it was still there ... but what? The "humanism" that is not a classical-philosophical, cultural-historical factitious concept. Now, when I again traveled to the West, this is what was missing in everything – in the reality, the books, the questions and answers of individuals. (The concept was formulated here four hundred years ago, and the two intellectual earthquakes which produced a cultural complex from tongue of Asiatic land in Europe – the Renaissance and the Reformation – first appeared in the humanists' consciousness.) The Russians never experienced the Renaissance, nor the Reformation, because they were not humanists; the Russian "philanthropist" never sought the human measure, but always the extreme, the immoderate, the inhuman – this, too, came to my mind on the streets of Zurich during my strolls through the incidental association of ideas. (Well, this died out, I thought abstractly, the humanist died out in Europe like the bison

in the Polish forests. In Europe everyone who believes in man is suspect: what is he really after when he still professes a belief in man?)

What the humanists – Erasmus, Pirckheimer, Thomas More and a host of others – proclaimed, that great message no longer exercised any influence, I thought of this, too. (Pirckheimer and the names of the others didn't occur to me on the streets of Zurich; I only now write them down at a later date out of a desire for precision.) But what did they really want four hundred years later, those who believed "they are humanists because they are Europeans" – writers, friends of the people, occasionally a specialist who desired something beyond the "exact," something that could be termed "development"? They didn't want the System to be the measure – no matter what sort of religious or political, economic or social System it was – but Man himself.

This didn't succeed, I thought, looking around. I saw only Systems everywhere. Switzerland had a precise system. Trains were already running on time in Europe. But toward the end of the second week, I was wandering the streets of Zurich in an acute nervous crisis. The hotel was well-heated; but nothing around me warmed me from the inside. I thought about cutting the trip short and heading back early to chilly, occupied Budapest stagnating in destitution. But I stayed on, and I consoled myself with the thought that for me Europe represents not only "humanism," which no longer exists, but also everything whose memory occasionally flashed dimly in my mind even in the paralyzed languor of the war: the informed passion. There once existed a passionate Europe when humans didn't just want to know, they also wanted to be passionate. Passionate for what?... For Illusions, thus for God. Or for love, because they saw creative energy in love. Or for the erotic harmony of Beauty and Proportion. And what did they search for? Not just the Truth, but the

noble and lively adventure that Passion incites, because they wanted Erudition, and erudition is not possible without passion. The adventure that will turn into art or tragedy. The salon tipsiness of the spirit and the thoughts formulated with crystalline lam-bency. The wisely, harmoniously aged and magnificent cities where people lived who wanted not only to reside but live in their houses, who didn't believe that chemical fertilizer was just as important as counterpoint, and who didn't list genius on the stock market, like cattle for slaughter when the price of meat rises, measuring it instead by the opposition that genius so excellently conjures up. To put it plainly, there once was another Europe. I must search for it, I kept urging myself. And I left well-heated, neutral Switzerland for unheated, untidy and defeated Italy.

The train reached the Italian border after midnight, and it took some time before the officials allowed it to move on. Everyone was suspect then, every train, the passengers and also the baggage. But the Swiss border guard, as if sensing that "staying out" of something can be a heroic deed or a dishonorable act, was politely perfunctory when he looked into the compartment. "Don't be ashamed you stayed out," I thought when he closed the door. There are shocks and endeavors that carry humanity forward and higher - charming Switzerland locked among peaks, where people always lived in a state of historical shortness of breath and moral claustrophobia, did not become "higher," but safely remained what it was. And ultimately survival is just as heroic as the suffocating search for truth. There are controversies which can be won only at the higher level; during the past century, this little island of Europe clung tenaciously and consistently to the possibility of victory in a higher-level case. "Don't be ashamed you stayed out of it" - this is what I mumbled soundlessly but with conviction after the Swiss border guard - "It is enough that I was

'there' and couldn't help. Don't be ashamed that with distrust and a bad conscience you guard the craggy borders of a little country where a people had the courage to say 'no' whatever the consequences. And don't be ashamed either that you live under capitalism, under a system called by this sort of old-fashioned, lavender-scented word, because, above all, this system functions in a manner producing contentment noiselessly and visibly. Everywhere well-paid beings do their work and no one plunders. Don't be ashamed you aren't a hero" – this was what I thought in the dark. And I looked out the window because the train had finally started and crossed from neutral Switzerland into defeated Italy.

I heaved a sigh of relief. Everything was familiar here, more human and open than in Switzerland, where the inhabitants passed the history examination with distinction. At least the Italians did not insist they were innocent. Naturally, everyone with whom I exchanged words was "a resistance fighter," but, at the same time, most of them readily admitted that for twenty years nearly all Italians – with few exceptions – were Fascists. Moreover, they were poor; the tattered poverty of the lost war shrieked on the streets and in the homes, and it was perhaps precisely for this reason that they were cordial and human.

I traveled to Rome, from there to Naples. The sun shined on Posillipo. The memory of this sunshine accompanied me on the rest of my journey; it came home with me to Hungary, to shine there in the dark times that were to follow. On my journey in the West, the Posillipo's sunshine was the only inviting, conciliating reality. I later thought back on this radiance, on this invitation, and when I again set out – by then never to return again – I traveled directly here. I plunged headfirst into the Posillipo's radiance, like the suicide who throws away his life belt after long hesitation and leaps into the Niagara. Into the Light, the

pure Light, after the darkness, the idiotic dimness; back into the Light where one cannot deceive and it isn't worth the trouble to lie, where everything radiates, the true and the false; to face the Light which sometime long ago emanated from here to a dark, primitive Europe. A decade later, I thought of the vivid light of the Posillipo in the New York night, in the shivering neon lights.

But one can only bathe in the Light, as in the ocean – humans can't live in it permanently because they will be dazed by it. One can live only in half-light – live, hence formulate, and then act. For this reason, I lengthened my stride with closed eyes on the Italian hilltop and departed for Paris. At the French border I was almost put in jail because the customs officer worriedly undid every piece of my threadbare clothing and wanted to know whether I was smuggling anything in – but what? I didn't know. What those who travel from the Light into the darkness generally smuggle?

2

The train arrived in the City of Light late at night. Paris was dark, and it felt cold. Everyone was terrifyingly polite to me. It seemed everyone was continually and constrainedly speaking about something else. Everyone asserted he was without blame and victorious. About the reality, that Europe, in its entirety, had lost the war, and a victorious Europe no longer existed – about that no one spoke a word, if possible. Not even the relentless logic of the French language could transmit its shafts of light through the uneasiness of our constrained, awkward greetings and the murkiness of our conversations.

Seeing Paris again turned out to be a dreary courtship, nothing more. The memories, the hazy scenes of my youthful years of wandering, the nostal-

gic encounters returned dimly. This surprised me because it was in Paris that I underwent everything that was a decisive, essential "experience" in my life.

I had lived the years of my youth here: the time whose memory later seems like the vision of a robber's adventure, and one can never exactly tell who was the victim and who the robber in this robber's adventure. I was "young" in Paris, and the memory of youth is always like a dress rehearsal for a strange tragicomedy. Now I felt my way through the dilapidated settings: I went to the Rue Demours and looked at the house where Lola and I had lived for years; the house, as in all of Paris, was grimy but escaped undamaged. I entered the staircase, where a door opened behind which Mr. Henriquet lived, the superintendent who was a mortician in his spare time and scrutinized the residents with an expert look, like someone certain that, sooner or later, wearing black clothing and a top hat, he would escort them to permanent accommodations. I went to the Left Bank, to the beginning of the Rue Vaugirard where, at the corner of St. Michael's road, still stood the run-down hotel where, beside the entrance, worn gold letters engraved on a black enamel plate announced that the great invention of the century, electricity, was already available in the student hotel. "Electricity," the engraving proclaimed, and this prehistoric find called to mind the illumination of youth's deep waters, its atmosphere, its smells, that tattered and troubled trance which we later think of as the "good and happy time." (It wasn't that.) I stopped in front of a gate and recalled that something I believed to be vitally important had crossed my mind here. (It wasn't that.) I sat down in a café where I used to meet or say goodbye to someone. In reality, I encountered only the years of my youth here, and then I bade farewell to them as well.

Still, here I was in Paris again, where in the thick smells, in the air steeped with the fumes of

frying oil, aperitifs and the smoke of coarse tobacco, memories of the pirate world of youth whirled around me. I roamed the streets of the Left Bank, and many restless and bad memories of my youth flashed dimly in my mind, the longings and the disappointments, and always the uncertainty beneath it all. It wasn't an idyllic situation for young people to be in Paris after the First World War. At that time, when young – as now gray-headed – I hoped to obtain an answer from Paris, an answer to doubts persisting at home. People in the West know more because they have lived in humanistic culture longer than our part of the world has. If not with these very same words but with the same meaning, whispering, we thus encouraged ourselves at home. And now, when one returned after a long absence and great ordeals, he hoped to receive an Answer.

But in Paris no one and nothing answered or had changed. It seemed as if the great city had survived the war in a state of benumbed lockjaw.

It seemed – in Paris and everywhere in the West – that people wanted to pick up life where they had left off before the war. The very same numbing customs, decayed outlooks and ossified obsessions bared their teeth everywhere. The greatest misfortune to strike the human race to this point, the Second World War, this catastrophe, apocalyptic in its dimensions and vertical devastation, seemed not to have touched the conscience of the West. Not a trace of moral reckoning was to be found anywhere. Like the generation before, peace treaties were being drafted in Paris, and, like the generation before, maps were again being cut up with scissors with headstrong and intractable shortsightedness; historical units, historical economic and cultural communities were being disposed of on the basis of skewed statistics. The West again wanted "security" at any price because no one had learned and no one wanted to know that security cannot be created by

force and by the deliberate distortion of facts. And no one mentioned that the great stream of history had already passed by the shores of Europe. (Everyone knew it had, if not with their minds, then with their guts; but no one talked about it.)

The maps were redrawn, and again the West sought revenge, not justice. Some Western politicians had disappeared – in the concentration camps, through emigration or on the scaffold – but otherwise and generally, the old set of human furnishings swaggered, swarmed and mouthed the same old slogans everywhere. Settling of accounts and reckonings were screamed and stammered in parliaments, newspapers, mass meetings and cafés, as if the West didn't know that a powerful world concept still centered in Europe before the Second World War was completely finished.

I conversed with the French, some English and Americans. Among them, not one turned up to point out to me – the writer from Eastern Europe who was in the West by chance – the fact that the white man's four-hundred-year domination of the world was at an end, that what was now beginning in the world could not be secured through artificially drawn treaties.

Later, when I thought back in America on these troubling encounters in Switzerland, Rome, and Paris, I perceived something eerie in the ingenuousness that Western Man – and uncommonly well-educated persons reflecting with wide perspectives who turned up among my conversational partners – did not know, or did not want to know about the change beyond all conceivable importance and speed that had, in a short time, after two decades, materialized in the world. Every one of them had already half-heard something about new inventions and instruments and processes in progress; but in the period immediately following the Second World War very rare was the informed individual who suspected that the forms and possibilities for human coexistence known to that time would

perish in the technological revolution. The atom bomb had already exploded, and human beings looked with horror and hope at the mushroom cloud in which the specter of global annihilation swirled but in which an energy promoting a new, peaceful existence for a boundless expanse of time also pulsed. Radar, radio and penicillin were already commonplace, but no one dreamt that new inventions – television, the computer, jet-powered airplanes and antibiotics – alongside the modern symptoms of over-population and aging, the globally instantaneous communication, the production and distribution, and the wondrous and dreadful paraphernalia of post-industrial civilization, were no longer the visions of technicians and biologists, but a formulated and implemented reality. No one spoke about the fact that this new civilization, so completely different from any that had gone before, would materialize not sometime in the distant future but in the present. Change was always occurring, but while man moved from four legs to two, then switched from the horse to the wagon with wheels, from the wagon to the steam engine, then the exploding motor, centuries, sometimes millennia passed, giving mankind the means and the time to adapt, to become accustomed to the change. Now, no one surmised that the future, the change, like the arrow of God, would strike unexpectedly and abruptly in the slothful and moldy present.

Only the specialists, the initiates in the laboratories knew about this; they knew that the till then unsurmised, unsuspected possibilities of transportation, communication and increased industrial and agricultural production never materialized in a finished or half-finished condition in any period of development – but no one spoke about the consequences. (And today – the contemporaries – the beneficiaries and the vanquished of the new civilization, the criminals responsible for the polluted fresh waters, oceans filled with swill and other outrages against a withering nature,

what do we know, what do we surmise about the future, which is already here and will become reality in the lifetime of a generation?) Sluggish propeller-driven planes flew above the ocean, rockets were frequently mentioned, like the war junk of bad memories, but no one thought that in a few years these rockets would transport man to the moon. No one suspected that a civilization had ended, and that what had already materialized in peace was not an alteration of civilization but a new world concept to which mankind would not have the time to adapt. For this reason, we just sat around on the terrace of the Parisian café, in February 1947, friends and acquaintances, and I heard them say that the time had irrevocably come to create order in Europe.

Back home, in the hovels of the war and military occupation, a memory of Paris had appeared vaguely to me, a place where people lived more closely to what is "modern," where they formulated ideas more quickly and precisely than we did. Then after the war, so we hoped, we would find in Paris what was already flickering in our own regions or had actually gone out: the courageous and precisely composed self-criticism, the moral reckoning unlike the humiliating stammer wrested from one with the instruments of the police by despotic systems but the voluntary showing of one's true colors from which cleansing and catharsis ensue. Perhaps in Paris, so I hoped, something of the fearless, uninhibited sincerity of youth would once again reappear. A great people, the French, overcame horrible ordeals; they could respond to this severe trial only with deliberate self-criticism. In the future, the French will, perhaps, be proud instead of vain, act more than talk, be more considerate of strangers and more critical of themselves. I roamed about Paris, searching not so much for a lost time, the past, as for the present. But this present was pedantic, regressive, illiberal, intractable. And no one mentioned the fact

that the future was already knocking on the door and that everything they wanted to resuscitate from the obessions of the past was pitifully outmoded.

People hadn't learned anything (when do they ever?;) – this was how I consoled myself: maybe the books had! The encounter with the books of the West! – for me this was the real significance of my journey. In Hungary – during and following the war, we regarded western books as precious and rare contraband. Here in Paris, two years after the weapons fell silent, printing presses were operating at maximum revolutions per minute. I stood longingly in front of the displays of long-established booksellers and eagerly entered the Parisian bookstores. Behind the counters stood the familiar proprietors, the old guardsmen who not only sold books but sometimes read them, and some recognized the returning prodigal son and greeted me with affable deference. When I asked them for advice and information after the protracted short-circuiting of my intellect about where I should commence my reacquaintance with books, one or other of them, shrugging shoulders, acknowledged that books are abundant but that nowadays there was something wrong with them. There were too many books, they said, grumbling with professional discontent.

When I began leafing through books and deciding which ones to buy, I understood the reason for their complaining. During my studious turning of pages, my suspicion that some affliction had befallen books in the West grew. Apparently, something else had also "happened," not just that Western book publishing, liberated from the war's straitjacket, tetanic isolation, censorship and scarcity of raw materials, had, in jittery and greedy haste, flung on the market everything that asked for permission to speak up at long last, that wanted to reach light from darkness – no, something had happened to the book as a literary form. It seemed as if the book no longer sprang from

ideas, nerves, memories and musings but from *ersatz* materials; *ersatz* products of the intellect proliferated, hunched, piled up in the shop windows. It was not "trash"; it was something else. "Trash" has always existed, but at least it was open about what it was, it never covered the true face of literature. This para-literature now gushing forth like an intellectual tidal wave inundated everything, including the critical columns of newspapers and periodicals.

To me, French literature was what opium was to the addict, the sober stupor of the intellect. At this time, immediately after the World War, technical literature was still not suffocating *belles-lettres* as it would ten years later; a "belles" literature still existed that wasn't ashamed to be beautiful. But the suspicion that people were no longer expecting answers to their problems to come from imaginative literature spread atmospherically in the bookstores and libraries. I still remember the expectant excitement of youthful years – those of the century's and my own concurrent youth – when, some decades before, the evangelical good news spread that a great work was being prepared in a writer's study: a great writer was at work in England, Italy, France or Germany crowning his lifework. And this was truly "good news," an evangelical message. A generation still believed in literature; its members were still confident that books could minister to their needs.

The great generation of French writers was still living. Immediately following the war, the rumor was that great literary works were being written. But the roster of names did not convince one that the crisis of the book could be staved off forever. The great names promised nothing that encouraged anyone to hope that books could still furnish answers. Who was still on the scene after the Second World War? Who had survived the past quarter of the century? Valéry was still living, and his sowing the sparks of his genius on the Mediter-

anean shore occasionally glittered. Gide's honesty, that concentrated intellectual solution with chemical strength, still had an impact. The one-book Camus (*The Rebel*, this was his book) asked to speak, but he didn't have enough time left to put down what he wanted to say. Giraudoux's fireworks had already exploded repeatedly, and Martin Du Gard moved into the Pantheon of middle-class literature, receiving a place alongside Flaubert and Maupassant, where — like the engraving on the base of patriotic statues — the blurb warns the public that urinating on the monuments is forbidden, *defense d'uriner*. Malraux was already debating whether he should remain a writer or strike out as a condottiere with pension rights in the procession of a paranoid dictatorship covered with a fig leaf. Montherlant invariably asserted that he is in the full vigor of manhood, *potens*. At least this was amusing. And in the background, in a mythical dimension, Proust's shadow grew; this powerful, frightening and prodigious inferno whirled whose sulfurous smoke also enveloped the social horrors of the century — Proust's work, the conclusion and consummation of everything the great generation and French literature created. But the book itself, so it seemed, no longer held that "place of trust" which not long ago still gave it decisive say and power. And there was something frightening about this.

Later, I recollected this first shock, and I comforted myself by thinking that my stupefaction was naive, shortsighted. But the next two decades proved I had instinctively surmised the danger: the book changed in its essence. Books proliferated abnormally (as did the individuals who read and the writers who wrote), and the mass book for mass man was merely an expedient, like vitamins, the radio or the automobile. Everyone owned books, but increasingly fewer persons looked to them for answers. They expected knowledge or entertainment or astonishment, scandal

or lurid experience, but only a few hoped for answers. And not only because in the paper boom following the war profit-greedy middlemen threw print paper on the market by the truckloads, but because for humans the liturgy of reading changed not only in content but in literary form. People adapted themselves reluctantly to different, pagan liturgies; a picture civilization replaced print civilization – so wise men later diagnosed the phenomenon. (And the picture doesn't have to be understood, it's enough just to look at it, with gaping mouth, without intellectual effort.) Truth existed in everything. But it wasn't this that was frightening. Ever more books streamed from book factories; writers, in increasing numbers and works, wrote by the job; new genres came into existence: the industry of posthumous letters and biographical Stahanovism flourished. But ever fewer persons had faith in the book. And without faith there is no literature.

Pascal still believed that the human heart is one of the supreme organs of the cognitive faculties, like the intellectual faculty and those of seeing, hearing, touching and tasting. Man discovers the meaning of phenomena and mass not just with his intellect but also with his heart – this is what he believed. Pascal was a great poet, not just a man of learning; he also reasoned with his heart when he investigated numbers and their infinite principles.

My long-awaited reunion with books in the West after the war was like that of someone encountering after a long absence a dear acquaintance who, he knows, lived through stormy times in comparative safety. And now, at the moment of the encounter, he senses reluctantly that the good friend has suffered some misfortune. There is something unfamiliar, strange in his look, manner, bearing. What happened to him? Is an illness brewing in his body, perhaps a cancerous, ulcerous process that has not yet manifested itself, but his assaulted constitution is already

showing signs of the crisis? What did this reunion signify? I bought a few books – more out of courtesy than real need – with the readiness of a reflex action; after all, it was finally possible for me to select freely and to buy Western books again.

But my anxiety did not lessen – the concern that the book (hence the literary form through which Europe spoke with its true voice) had changed in its essence, in its organic reality. It was no longer a Message, only an informational medium, a commodity. I began to suspect I wouldn't find in the West what I came for – and perhaps it would not be fruitless for me to return to the place where people still believed in the Book.

3

After several weeks of shivery sightseeing in Paris, I decided on the night before my departure to make a pilgrimage, for the last time, to Montparnasse, the artists' quarter, where twenty-five years earlier I had lived for years that troubled period of life not precisely definable in calendar terms which people later give the name of "youth." The famous bohemian cafés, the Dôme, the Coupole and the Rotonde, still remained; the hooded iron stove still warmed the regulars settled beside the round tables from the wintry streets; the waiter, with the unvarying rudeness of Paris, served the "national coffee," that grayish-brown wish-wash which passed for coffee in Paris and which, like everything labeled "national," roused the suspicion that it wasn't what it was called but only resembled the real thing. Now, too, the guests languished on the terraces of the cafés of a literary-historical character at little tables piled high with saucers, but not a single familiar face appeared in the rancid, acrid tobacco smoke of the *caporale*.

The place, the circumstances, everything was

extremely familiar and, at the same time, ominously strange – like a quarter of a century before, when I was a daily regular at the Dôme. There had been six years in my life – and then with recurring rhythms, sometimes even months, often weeks – when I, too, hung out at the Dôme nearly every night. Looking around, I now felt the sensation that one experiences in the anxiety at the illusion of the Bergsonian *déjà vu*: all this I “lived not just once,” but I am “reliving” it now in the present, in simultaneous reality. Twenty-five years ago, after the First World War, we camped here exactly like this: the emigrated, the voluntarily exiled generation – separated by opinion and nationality but still related in tribal complicity – a wild and exotic crowd. Here at the adjoining table sat Unamuno, who feared death and hated Primo de Rivera, the faded general in the picture gallery of Spanish dictators. Here among the tables strolled Pascin, the Bulgarian painter who chose his models from the obese residents of the neighboring bordellos, and afterwards hanged himself in one of the grimy studios on a street close by. Here muttered Tihanyi, the Hungarian painter who was deaf-and-dumb in four languages. Here hung about Derain and Picasso, whose names then even the professionals heard only with half an ear. Here sat every evening the chief steward of the Dada movement, the monocled Tristan Tzara, with the formal dignity of a croupier and a pagan priest. Here Ezra Pound gyrated in a red-bearded Buffalo Bill mask, the Quaker offspring, the American poet who came to Europe after the First World War and declared that he was a humanist because “history is made by human beings” – for this reason he created a myth and later built into the Pound myth many elements which prominent figures capable of thought said and wrote somewhere in some language because “human utopias flower jointly in literature and art” simultaneously, hence without epochs. World lit-

erature – so Pound believed here in Montparnasse and later on – is an “established discourse” above place and time between persons with the highest talents. (Babits also held this view.) He produced an epic poem, and like Homer’s, Virgil’s, and Dante’s epic poems, *Nekyia* was the dimension of Pound’s own epic, thus the visit of the living to the world of the dead, the search for an answer. Twenty-five years before, Pound was a regular in Montparnasse: now his figure materialized, and could not be ignored. He was always smiling, and there was something maniacal and idiotic in that red-bearded smile. Later, the Americans, literally, locked him in a cage because he delivered war speeches on Mussolini’s radio; he spoke against the “usury” which was a “history-making” force in the single combat between the Powers of Light and Darkness. Later, he was taken, shackled, to Washington and committed as a war criminal to a mental hospital; there, for fourteen years, he walked about with his red beard, smiled among the lunatics, and wrote the *Cantos*, and his wife, Dorothy Shakespear, visited him every day. On his release he returned to Italy, to stroll, smile and listen.

Ah yes, Pound. Here in the Dôme he discovered the secret of “image,” the secret of the language of gesture and key symbol of East Asian and Japanese poetry: the Poet should not speak in poetry, it should be the Image which the Poet makes perceptible with words, so that the Poem, at the impact of the Image, materializes in the reader. He stated that a Chinese writer said long ago: “The poet who can’t say in at most twelve lines what he wants to say would be wiser if he did not write.” He translated constantly (like the Hungarians); his knowledge of languages was generally superficial and limited, but still he translated obstinately from Hebrew, Chinese, Latin, Greek, and Provence because he believed that “literature was interdependent.” He believed that our times provide a

powerful stimulus and opportunity to literature because "contacts could be discovered" with things that humans only dreamt of earlier; he talked about Disney, who scented the possibility of this contact everywhere in everything – in animals, beneath the sea, everywhere. "Experience" is the greatest stimulus of the vision of poetry; thus he believed (like Goethe), and he cited Alexander the Great, who commanded the fishermen to relate to Aristotle everything they experienced about the life of fish. He frequently mentioned Frost ("O God, pay attention to me...!) – this is how one must pray, but this is also how one must write poetry. He hated the "terror of luxury," just as he did the terror of a majority in a democracy. And here in Montparnasse he was revising Eliot's manuscript, *The Wasteland*. Pound and Gertrude Stein were the homeless American writer-generation's nursemaids, midwives, patrons and sick-nurses in Paris twenty-five years ago. Now when his figure appeared before me, I was disposed to rise from where I was sitting and doff my hat.

Possibly the lunatics were numerous among them (and us). The way Pirandello's Henry IV went mad playing the role of the madman. It is certain that Pound was the most three-dimensional among the genius monsters of that time in Montparnasse. He believed he would condense in the *Cantos*-cycle the "ancient culture," the experiences innate in all mankind. He saw the purport of poetry in the Word, in the Verb, which is simultaneously Flesh and Word. I didn't know him personally, but I saw him every day in the Dôme or Coupole; those who are moving in a time toward something together and simultaneously somehow never "know" each other. A contemporary doesn't have a historical face.

Here the young American writers tossed down cheap brandy. Fitzgerald, Faulkner, Hemingway with his toothbrush mustache, and many more who fled

from dreariness, from commercially pseudo-Puritan America to Montparnasse, and learned in Gertrude Stein's seminar on the Seine's left bank that literature is the word which must be repeated so that it will have rhythm and hence turn into energy. (Like the Negro beating the drum? Like that, yes, but the poet not only drums, he is also remembering meanwhile.)

In 1923, all the expatriates in Montparnasse, in this gypsy settlement were "leftists," and not one of them really knew what the true motives of left-wingism were. In it were disillusionment, lack of self-confidence (no one trusted the "*mot juste*" any longer, some other potentially explosive Word had to be found to replace it); in it were vanity, insatiability, the uncertainty about role and talent, but something else as well. In the time after the First World War, every writer and artist felt that a world had come to an end around them which they could speak to and believe in, and a measureless nostalgia seduced writers and artists into "belonging" somewhere. "Left-wingism" was the utopian country to which it was possible "to belong." (Like today.) Here tottered Joyce, holding on to his cane, half-blind and penniless, and he blew up words and ideas because he couldn't blow up anything else.

Everyone was in pain because a world had collapsed. The Americans who then (as now) fled across the ocean were just as stateless as we, the provincials who left countries closer by; we didn't belong anywhere either any more. Later, we dispersed. Pound returned to Italy, from where he wrote to his publisher, Miss Monroe, that "here poverty is decent and respectable... unlike America, where poverty is constantly insulted and scorned." Here, in Montparnasse he saw that in America poverty is not only an unfavorable social condition, but also a form of anti-American behavior — society punished the one who is poor; if not otherwise, then by throwing him a monthly welfare check.

(Because it is possible to punish poverty this way, too
– *Made in the U.S.A.*)

Here T. S. Eliot sauntered along; the poet scurried among the tables. He stood out in a way different from Pound. He didn't grow flaming red hair; he shaved, had a stove-pipe hat and an umbrella; he dressed unostentatiously and glanced around bespectacled and nearsighted and in shamefaced alarm, like an Episcopalian divinity student who, having strayed onto forbidden territory, feared that if seen, he would bring himself into disrepute with the congregation. He was poor, too, like Pound, but he was poor in a neatly pressed, polished, and polite way. He trod warily among Tristan Tzara and the bulging hirsute of Dada, like a missionary among savages. And actually – it later emerged – that is what he was, a missionary. The manuscript he was carrying in his pocket – first drafts of *The Wasteland* and *Four Quartets*, from which Pound ruthlessly cut half the lines – converted a generation of poets to a new faith. After Eliot's verses it was no longer possible to write poetry – not in Montparnasse or anywhere else either – the way it was at the time of Mallarmé and Valéry. Dante was his master when, blinking and nearsighted, he created the idea of the "metaphor"; he believed Dante was the "best school" for poets, a Poet who ascended to the Lofty and descended to the Low with a penetrating power like no one else, and could recount with the utmost economy what he saw in Hell and Heaven. Eliot was also a believer, but a believer according to his "temperament," not conviction; he quoted Pascal, who was a Jansenist, from cowardliness because he did not have the strength to reject the supposition that Grace – the Grace of St. Augustine, which is more efficacious than intellect and character – answers everything. And Eliot also knew (he wrote it about Dickens) that there is no drama without melodrama. (As Valéry knew it was not possible to write a novel without a sentence

like this: "The marchioness left her home at five in the afternoon," or something similar.) In Eliot's poems there was some kind of gravely vibrating lyre behind the text and, at the same time, there was in his poems an almost journalistic slipperiness and banality — as if he were attempting the first writing of pop poetry.

In one of his poems he spoke of the "edge," of the moment when the Timeless encounters Time. (The poem came to my mind because this, too, was "such" a moment, twenty-five years later. This encounter is the boundary line: it is the moment of birth and death. That which "was" formless in the Timeless receives form in Time, and that which once receives form immediately begins the process of decay, of turning into formlessness. Like everyone — then on the terraces of the Montparnasse cafés but elsewhere as well, eternally — the generation sitting here was waiting to receive form. Fitzgerald most often sat in Hemingway's company. He didn't have time to receive form because he drank himself away and died young. Pound, Eliot, and Joyce lived on loans and small grants, but there was another generation of American writers who, like Fitzgerald and Hemingway, made thousands of hard dollars from American magazines that included stories fashionable at the time, and they squandered the large sums of money with jaunty extravagance, and were always up to their ears in debt. (But at least this generation was capable. Today, fashionable American writers make millions with wretched trash.)

This generation sat here and waited to receive form. An American woman said this about Pound, who may have been forty at the time: "He is an interesting man, but we must wait until he grows up." The entire generation waited for him to grow up. In the literary menagerie of Parisian expatriates, Pound was an unforgettable phenomenon. He and many others belonged to the griffin band of the myth of the youthful years. This was their time, after the First World War —

the rebellious, fugitive, protesting period of a generation. And this was my time as well.

They got lost: some to success, others in trenches, gas chambers, or to alcohol. The generation vanished but left an atmosphere behind, the way great works do. Now, after the Second World War, when every barbarian and dolt was the "very same" as twenty-five years before, I looked around the Dôme's terrace and searched for who and what came in the place of the Vanished Generation. The feeling of something lacking aroused in me by this revisiting of the West was fiery and stomach wrenching: What was missing in this ravaged, pillaged West? Humanism? I suspected that the magic had also evaporated from this illusion; its meaning had burned out as it had in everything else. Great Frenchmen, Chateaubriand and many others, accused the French of lacking the propensity for humaneness. After all, the vanished generation did believe in something given the nebulous and vague name of "human." This vanished generation rebelled and protested against everything that was calcified in literature, art, and coexistence. What kind of rebellion was replying now to shame and horror, to the humanity-denying sneer of the Second World War?

I ordered a brandy because I needed a pick-me-up. And I bought an evening paper from the vendor who was just shuffling by. I began reading the headlines printed in large type. Then the front page completely, lengthwise and crosswise.

4

It made interesting reading. There are days when everything, personal and worldly, intermeshes. When "History" becomes a private matter, a palpable personal reality. The evening issue of a popular Parisian journal reported in large headlines that on this

day – February 10, 1947, in the morning – exactly two years after the signing of the Yalta Agreement) – the said dictates of the peace treaty, the coercive documents for Hungary, Finland, Bulgaria, Rumania, and Italy were signed in one of the resplendent chambers of the French foreign ministry. Since the Hungarian peace treaty interested me, I read it first, word by word. The camouflaged propaganda of the Benes factions’ petty-bourgeois, nationalist democracy had triumphed again; as twenty-five years before, dictates restored the national boundaries that existed prior to 1938. My birthplace, fair and noble Kassa, wound up in Czech hands again. Without being asked and against their will, true-born Hungarians in Upper Hungary were delivered to Czech and Slovak mini-imperialism. Several sanctimonious declarations about the “right of peoples to free self-determination” could be read in the peace document, but they were only the dust-covered flowers of rhetoric. The reality, that these peoples would again not be able to participate in shaping their own fate, doubled back in a quarter of a century turning of a wheel, and everything remained as had come to pass after the First World War.

“Facts are more valuable than dreams,” sighed England’s prime minister, Churchill, during the trying hours. Facts spoke up on this day. Transylvania, Upper Hungary and Lower Hungary were separated from their national community of one thousand years. (A new color on the palette was the “exchange of population,” which recommended the reciprocal and voluntary relocation of Hungarian and Slovak minorities.) The amount of reparations was set at 300 million dollars – 200 million for the Soviet Union and 50 million each for Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia – and this tribute was heaped atop the robbery, looting, expropriations, goods forcibly removed, plunder, which comprised a high multiple of dollar value in amount; after all, the country paid not with hard currency but with

goods devalued at the sacrifice of unfair estimates. A single hope shined through the peace terms: the Soviet Union could keep its armed forces in Hungary only until the peace pact was signed with Austria, and then the joint Soviet military forces had to be withdrawn from the country's territory. If this took place, perhaps it would be possible to attempt what the Communists had twice thwarted – in 1919 and 1945 – a more modern, more humane social coexistence in Hungary.

This was the night when one thinks he can see destiny more clearly for having undergone many errant and bitter experiences: the personal opportunities and the prospects beyond the personal, the reality between two obscurities. I am thinking back to that night, and this expectation now seems grotesque: it has an ancillary sound like the enthusiastic rhymed tag in Jenő Heltai's poem: "Today is a different day, today is a different day from another time/ Because today come to an end, because today the Dark Middle Ages come to an end." (Nothing came to an end; instead a new darkness began, a neonlit darkness.) Nevertheless, this was the night when, without any personal compelling, urgent motive but with "historical perspective," I had to decide whether to return to Budapest from the West or not. (As a generation before, when after a long stay in Paris, I had to make the very same decision.) Reason and reflection play only a slight role in this kind of "decision." A decision has to be made about life, about our personal, sole and irredeemable reality, about our individual destiny – not about our "country," not even about the extent of our "community" with the "nation." The night was foggy. Paris glowed coldly in the frosty fog.

What awaited me at home, in Hungary? A dismembered Hungary drained of its blood. A Russian military occupation that perhaps would end some day. But what about until then? A society shattered in its structural foundations that would require a long time

for a new, more humane hierarchy to develop. A language spoken by ten million people and not understood by anyone else. Having done the homework, I knew that about seventy languages are spoken in Europe and that ninety-five percent of these languages are of Indo-European origin. My mother tongue belonged to the remaining five percent, the Magyar of Ural-Altaic origin.

What awaited me in the West if I did not go back? A Europe that the Westerners construe differently than did we "*la-bas*" (as the "Westerners" often called us superciliously and with condescending arrogance). My individual lot could work out pleasantly, but this would not alter the fact that here I would always be only a tolerated, humored, harbored foreigner. For me personally and truly what did the notion "Europe" mean? (Like the desecrator, I swallowed in alarm: Is one free to ask such a thing?) Wasn't Europe "everything," the meaning of life? If yes (and through a lifetime I believed it was to my very marrow), then why this shivering, recoiling, resisting? Why didn't I stay abroad at the time? What did "Europe" actually and personally mean to me? What did this notion still represent to me, to the person? The Hungarian? (This was the moment – as sometimes before and frequently afterwards – when the rattle from Babits's throat rasped once again? "My voice shouts, my poem declares/What is most painful to declare/That we are not nobodies and nothings ...") Like the music box when a farthing is inserted into it, the consciousness ground out mechanically the examination theses: Greek and Roman culture, Christianity, humanism, the Enlightenment. But now I had no desire to get a top mark from Europe. What I would have liked to know was: what was still the "extra" for me, the European reality – without deceptions, without rote and conditional token words – the residue that formed a living reality, other than something to wonder at in the exhibition

hall of a petrified and obsolete civilization? What was missing in Europe for me personally? A "sense of mission"? The words flashed and struck.

There had once been something in Europe – sometimes I, too, stated and wrote it down – something that was, perhaps naively, called a "sense of mission". The notion is pompous. Still, for my generation, too, there was some kind of diluted reality in it; the consciousness that being born in Europe, being a European was not only a physical or political condition but a creed. But this sense of mission was not perceptible in anyone, in anything any longer. Wise old politicians were already speaking about the need to create an economic community in Europe against and above national interests. But an economically united Europe without a sense of mission could not be a world power, as it was for centuries when it believed in itself and its mission.

And so many lies were told about this exactly at this time, in the century I matched in age. The Nazis lied when they talked about their European sense of mission and set out on their marauding venture. Politicians and statesmen lied when they patched power systems together and fluttered the slogans of the European sense of mission above the barriers. They sang the grand aria about the European sense of mission in editorials and parliaments, on platforms and barrel tops. But what kind of mission awaited me, the wandering traveler, the provincial newcomer after the war in the West? Where was the Idea, the evangelical Good News that is more and something other than words promoting an eroded, parched civilization? There was a culture – the European – which those who dwelled in it believed in for thousands of years: a mission. Now they converted it into an export commodity: *Made in Europe*. But who wanted this export? ("European civilization loses some of its quality with every new period ... Michelangelo was, after all, better than Picasso,"

Malraux sighed decades later.) Possibly Toqueville was right, who a century ago prophesied here in Paris that Europe will come to naught between two great magnets, Russia and America. If this was true (and everyone who set out in Europe experienced a measure of the reality of this ominous anxiety), there will be only one kind of Euramerica, and some sort of Eurasia will remain, but that which will "remain" without a mission will no longer be "Europe." Stirrings of powerful forces could be sensed everywhere in Europe, forces that repelled and those that attracted. But what were they heading toward?

Everyone preserves a different Paris in his soul, everyone who was young in this extraordinary and magnificent city. I searched for my own Paris, but the great city and, yes, the great people made me feel ill at ease on the occasion of my return. (I didn't feel this uneasiness in Italy for an instant; the generous humanity of the Italians remained unchanged even amid the ordeals of war.) The French with whom I spoke retained their spirit and judgment; they clearly and sharply perceived their country's place in the world and asserted that the present was only a time of "crisis"; a great people, the French, were bound to find their role in the world again. The intellectual spirit of this people was for centuries the primary mentor of Europe; its logic and sense of proportion, its analytical capability and form-creating aptitude taught peoples and generations to feel, see, think, and create in the European manner. But this people whose spirit shined now, too, the educator of Europe was already searching restlessly for its role in the world, this anxiety resonating in every friendly chat. (Not just the French. Europe was also searching for its world role.)

Pessimistic philosophers of history like to feel out the fateful shadow-line, the "peripheral line of fate," when large collectivities – empires and continents – near the frontiers of their existence and role in

world history, and then those frontiers become shadowy and blurred because their role has ended. Beyond attempts at creating a common market, was there still a trace of European consciousness in art and literature? Was it possible that the civilized consciousness of the West had already moved farther from this part of the world, passed beyond the ocean? (After the war – personally and with every consequence – I thought about this in Paris for the first time. There was something in this conjecture that made me shudder.) And was it possible that America has already had its fill of this imported European civilization – it wants something else and is creating in its place a new civilization which is what it is but is already peculiarly its own, no longer a copy of European culture? (Possibly I should follow after this emigrated European sense of mission – just as occasionally someone sets out nostalgically to see again something from his childhood or youth. Go to the distant beyond, beyond the Seven Seas and breathe in the gentle breezes of a new civilization, its stimulating currents of air. Possibly the Americans, like the Russians, are commencing something.) Words, words, words. I ordered a glass of brandy.

French brandies are excellent. They simultaneously warm the brain and ganglions thoroughly, ignite the consciousness, like the electric spark the combustion engine. This *Armagnac* was also excellent. I tossed down a pony and ordered another one. The waiter, who stood beside the table expertly and observed the effect, approved of the idea. At the kindling of the second shot, the two decades that had elapsed between the musing reflection on such a night in Montparnasse and the present moment brightened. These twenty years constituted that period of my life when I wasn't operating on a battery (as I am now, as I write this), but on vigorous energy, on a dynamo. This was the time of ambition, passions, learning to write, ac-

quiring knowledge. (Then I still didn't know that there is a fuller human period: the time of oblivion.) What had I become acquainted with in these years between the two world wars? The realization touched me gently like a musty smell darting up from a drawer randomly pulled out. It was falsehood. This was the tenor of this time between the two world wars in Europe. Violence and compassion, heroism and cowardice, inhumanity and tolerance were always present. But falsehood had never before been such a history-making force as it was in these years.

They lied in Europe easily, automatically, unctuously, impeccably – the press, the radio, the book publishers, and then the new forms of communication media, every kind of printed matter, the paper litter with which they stuffed Western man's consciousness. Falsehoods reeked out of everything the way the noxious fumes of spontaneous combustion steam from a manure pile. In this century, the West lied to itself and to the world. It lied perpetually: it lied that it was a "country" and trumpeted some sort of raspy sentimentality along with it; but this, too, was only a falsehood, because the cliques who owned the countries saw the possibilities for limited ownership in them. It was a religion; they professed and lied because they did not demand vision from art. Vision has the power, the creative energy to reflect back on reality, not like the mass products, the commercial or political junk that can be offered and purchased. They spoke of human rights and permitted systems degrading everything humane to gain ascendancy. Westerners lied with the spoken and written word; they even lied with music from which they leached melody and harmony, replacing it with hysterical, writhing, epileptic caterwauling. This West lied, this West which I had called to mind in the pit of war like a good Samaritan. What could we Hungarians expect from this West which falsehood had so thoroughly contaminated? Never help and soli-

darity. There was no help for us, collectively or individually, only time.

Yes, French brandies are excellent. They set off a warm rush of blood in the cerebrum, dilate the capillaries; under their impact, the blood, pumping oxygen, the nutriment of consciousness, reaches the cerebrum more swiftly. Where do I belong? In the burned-out, stupidly lying West? Or shall I go back to Hungary? What awaited me at home? The "Native Land"? I had no desire to keep vowing constantly, to beguile myself with promises. I did not believe that the "Native Land" was waiting for me. But there are moments in life when – utterly quietly – we hear an answer, a message. This was that kind of moment. And the answer (as twenty years earlier in a similar situation) was now also a quiet one. I must go back to Hungary where no one awaits me, where there is no "role" or "mission," but where there is something that to me constitutes the only significance of life: the Hungarian language.

I understood this – once again, with all its consequences. Because, when young and then with hoary hair after two world wars, I never was interested, truly and constitutionally, hide and hair, in anything else: only in the Hungarian language and its highest embodiment, Hungarian literature. A language understood by ten million among the billions of human beings, and no one else. A literature locked into this language which, despite generations of heroic efforts, never could speak to the world in its true reality. But to me this language and this literature represented the life of full value, because in this language I could relate what I wanted to say. (And only in this language could I keep silent about what I wanted to keep silent about.) For I am "I" only when and while I can formulate in Hungarian what I am thinking. For example, the realization on the night of February 10, 1947, that for me there is no other "country," only the

Hungarian language. For this reason I must rush back to Hungary. To live there and wait until it is again possible to write freely. ("To write?" About what?) The books I took home from my Western trip said "no" to everything that was and is in disparate tones but unequivocally. But what is the "yes"? A holy crusade against Bolshevism? This is again a "no," a negation, the lack of something. "Christian democracy"? A democracy doesn't have a religion or denomination. "Socialist humanism"? As soon as a system is made out of Socialism it can no longer be human because every system is anti-human. Then what will I write about in "freedom" if it is possible to write at home again?

I glanced around the Dôme's terrace, as I had two decades earlier; I tapped the bottom of the brandy glass on the metal table; I called the waiter because I suddenly felt it urgent to pay and be on my way. The train was departing early in the morning: to where? Back to the Hungarian language. I hurried to return to the hotel, pack up, and, in the morning, go to the Gare l'Estre quickly and not miss the train that would take me back to my native language. While the taxi was rushing along on its way to the hotel, a voice spoke up in the Parisian night, asking impatiently (it later appeared in my travel diary and I also published it): Oh, when will that train be heading for the East?

The train started off on time. Then slowly, puffing and puffing, it slowly made its way across frozen, destitute Europe. During the journey, I had the opportunity take account of what I was actually carrying from this trip to the West back to my home in the East. No and again no, said Western literature obdurately and obstinately to the Right and the Left. But I would have liked to take something else home as well from my travels, something that constituted the West's answer to the East. The train was poorly heated and

stopped frequently. It stopped for long periods at the snow-covered stations.

At the boundary line marked by the bridge over the Enns, at the edge of the Russian occupation zone, a member of the Soviet patrol entered the compartment and asked for passports. Here, on the threshold of the line dividing Europe in two, a Red soldier dressed in parade uniform examined the passengers with military meticulousness – grimly, strictly but courteously. He looked at my passport, scrutinized my photo, and eyed its subject thoroughly. Then, wordlessly but without discourtesy, he returned the passport, raised his hand to the brim of his peaked cap, saluted, closed the door behind him, and moved on. I looked after him and thought of the fact that this soldier was an enemy. He has committed many horrors in Hungary, and it was possible he would bring many cruelties down on us in Hungary in the future, too. But it was certain that this Russian soldier would rob, perhaps even kill me, the Hungarian, but he would not look down on me. (In the West recently, very politely but in some manner, everyone looked down on me, the Easterner.) To him I was a Westerner he will bring to ruin but will not look down on. This wasn't much of a gift from a journey to the fair, but still, it was something.

5

*"....Only in Hungarian does 'I love you' truly
touch you
So 'szeretlek', my angel, butterfly, star and swan –
Only in this tongue do such words become more
than idiom
And just this difference has proved deadly to you
The whole world shines, so why hasten
To an empty home with such bewildering speed?*

*The language called and in its rhythms spoke
destiny
Let not your mother wait with open arms
in vain..."*

6

It did not wait in vain: I was greeted with news about the "conspiracies" on my arrival. It was a strange homecoming. When in February 1947, on a piercingly cold night near the end of winter – glass panes were already being installed in the iron roofing over the tracks – I felt with relief that it was right for me to return home, I belonged here. The "yes" must be attempted – with the very modest instruments and flawed methods of a writer – the "yes" must be framed (for my own sake) in the Hungarian language. It was more a feeling than something conscious when I thought the answer was still something that could be called "humanism." (And I felt this to be a ridiculously urgent matter.) Of course, I wanted to take a bath and change clothes first. I ordered a taxi – taxis were already operating in Budapest – and went home to Buda, to that hotel-like slum that I was crammed into after the siege.

By then people had for days been rounded up and hauled off to the prisons of the state police. This was the moment when many awakened from the illusion created about the "rose-colored democracy." This was the signal when the Communists, after two years of democratic scene-shifting, lying and exploratory preparation, received orders from Moscow to commence the complete, absolute Bolshevization of Hungarian society.

One of the accused in the first "conspiracy" (he was a serious, poor middle-class official, a neighbor of mine on Mikó Street in Buda, I often saw him in the morning on his way to the office standing on the cor-

ner waiting for the bus) – he was condemned to death after a short hearing by the people's tribunal. The morning paper reported that the "President of the Republic" – a Protestant minister – "denied the plea for clemency, and the brains behind the conspiracy was hanged." A journalist with whom I had worked on the editorial staff of a liberal newspaper before the war wrote an account of the passing of the sentence and mentioned that the accused – my neighbor in Buda – "wore a braided fur coat" at the hearing, and thus had to be a counterrevolutionary and conspirator. This journalist was not a particularly bloodthirsty man; he was a petty bourgeois from the cafés in Pest. But the subordinate clause giving word of the braided fur coat could have been written by Marat – or a stone's throw ahead in time, by the German Streicher, the editor of the infamous anti-Semitic hate sheet.

The so-called conspirators were put to death; others, who, I was certain, were not "fascists," just not Communists and thought about the development of Hungarian democracy exactly as I did, began to disappear single file into the system's dungeons. Near my flat in Buda there was an old swimming pool, where I went regularly. Every morning the members of a group formed over a long period of time swam in the sulfurous, exhilarating water. In these days one or another of my morning companions of a decade began failing to show up at the pool. At first I thought the one missing had caught a cold. But the midday newspaper reported that he had not caught a cold but had, instead, been arrested the night before as a "conspirator".

A second, and then additional "conspiracies" shortly followed the first one. In the fall of 1947, the Communists drove into exile the prime minister of the coalition government who attained his office following constitutional elections and put in his place a cynical, good-for-nothing, politically loitering knight-errant

who, during an inebriated, confidential conversation, admitted to his table companions with the disarming frankness of a hoodlum: "You can imagine the condition this country is in if I am its prime minister!" By now the Communists tolerated in the government only corrupt and role-hungry climbers who were willing to support the Communists' ancillary ventures. Naturally, the "conspirators" never dreamed about taking up arms against a system protected by Russian tanks and machine-guns on the country's own territory. They did not have secret stockpiles of weapons; they had absolutely no weapons; not even the false charges and the special judges of the martial law courts, who were called the "people's prosecutors," and who were often more bloodthirsty than the professional public prosecutors, could prove the accusations made against them. The accused did nothing more than what citizens in the West, in democracies (from where I had just now arrived post-haste), demanded loudly and openly at political meetings and then in the press and parliament: they were weaving plans about how and in what spirit, with what kind of measures the country's political, social and economic situation could be reorganized. As elsewhere, individuals appeared on the scene in Hungary who wanted to liberate the country from a system they disapproved of. Their plans agreed with the will of ninety percent of the Hungarian people. The Hungarian people did not want Communism, and as long as they had the opportunity to exist under the right to self-determination and free elections, they rejected it. What was a right in the West, indeed a citizen's duty – a nation's right to free self-determination – constituted a conspiracy in the East according to the Communists' interpretation and called for the rope.

A revolution can be a source of law. Not just "constitutional" law recorded on parchment and confirmed by a seal. Classical revolutions in modern times – the English in the seventeenth century (this revolution was officially contented with a king's head, though actually it also shed much human blood), the French and the American in the eighteenth century, the movements for independence in Europe about 1848, and finally the Russian revolution in the twentieth century – all these proved that revolution is a source of law. At the end of the First World War, the Russian people eliminated the czar system of government, and in this people's revolution of overwhelming force, the Communists coupled the Communist seizure of power arbitrarily and violently; they appropriated the revolution which the Russian people did not undertake in the behalf of the Communists. After all, the people and not even the majority of the revolutionaries really knew what Communism was. But it is certain that what was intolerable in human coexistence, the social injustices, underwent a change in these revolutions. Whatever remained from the past mingled organically with the new, with the demands of the revolution. But a revolution, even when it has an idealistic and moral substance, is always bloody, cruel and unjust. It is not only the revolution's targeted enemies who bleed to death on the barricades; often the ideal of the revolution does, too. Fortunate are the peoples who can realize social development without revolution. Fortunate are the Scandinavians, the Dutch... But this idyllic roster soon comes to an abrupt halt. And inasmuch as revolution is not only bloody but often also corrupt, larcenous, and perfidious (the Hungarian revolution of 1956 is a far-radiating historical rarity, for few examples with its moral purity turn up in history),

human beings, to the extent possible, defend themselves against it.

In Hungary in 1945 there wasn't an iota of inclination for revolution. No one can regret that such a revolution did not occur. Barricades appeared on the streets only decades later, when the Hungarian people rebelled against Communism. In the decade preceding 1956 there were times when the social situation in Hungary and in neighboring countries reduced to a similar fate brought to mind the inner structure of the ancient Inca empire. It was as if everything were being repeated in the world. The Inca rulers sent away the untrustworthy tribes from home (as did the Communists the large masses of intellectuals at the time of resettlement) and settled them in foreign places. They specified the standards of job performance strictly, and those who met them received a certain amount of food, articles of clothing, and tools. All the land belonged to the state; more precisely, to the God-king embodying the state. A worker could toil only one third of the time in his own and his family's behalf; he spent the remaining time performing contract-work for the state and its echelon, the priesthood and the ruling house. Eating was permitted only at an open door, and everyone received the same food, hence the standard meal. Like Lycurgus in Sparta and Mao on the collective farm, officials distributed the products made by potters, weavers, smithies and carpenters among the people. There was no freedom to move if someone wanted to migrate to the neighboring village; to do so, he first had to obtain official permission. All this was eerily present in the decade when the Communists set about carving up Hungary's social and spiritual core.

No one wanted a revolution in Hungary in 1945, but the Soviet Union would not have assented to a revolutionary action to eliminate what still remained obsolete from the past. Stalin didn't like revolutionaries. He had his reasons for executing the romantic

Spanish partisans, then all those among his confederates who, like Trotsky and many others, believed in the catharsis-fomenting energy of revolution. Stalin preferred subservient officials and blind and deaf robotic humans; everyone else roused his suspicions. Opportunely, in 1945, the Russian high command was not interested in a Hungarian social revolution either. Since the high command, following ancient Eastern precepts, did not dispatch matériel essential for the conduct of the war and then later for the military occupation, such as rations, diesel oil and livestock – in short the bulk of fresh supplies – but laid up stocks found in the occupied territories instead and requisitioned them with merciless, wily precision, it was not in the interest of the Russian military forces to lose track of goods remaining on Hungarian territory after the withdrawal of the Germans and the Arrow Cross in the chaos a revolution would produce.

After a brief time, the Communists wanted to make the Hungarian people believe that they had brought revolutionary achievements to their society without the blood sacrifice of a revolution. They confiscated the land and real estate; they “nationalized” industry and commerce; they took possession of state power in the “name of the working class”; they took over the schools, the press, and intellectual life on the pretext of “revolutionary ideology.” They appropriated private property, and since Communism regards individuality as private property, they one day set about appropriating individuality as well. When a vast majority of Hungarian society in a two-fold election, the first of which was absolutely free, rejected this system, the Communists declared with bitter discontent that Hungarian society is hopelessly “reactionary.” And since not only the Hungarian “ruling class” that had lost land and power was discontented with the change but also the large masses of the peasants and workers, the Communists described this unfavorable attitude of

the majority of the Hungarian people as a "fascist legacy" with terror and every intimidating branch of the police state. "We delivered land to the peasant and the factory to the worker, and we delivered the opportunities of socialist success to the intelligentsia, and what thanks do we get? They vote against us in elections, carry on sabotage in public and private life, wait for the imperialist enemy, and place their hopes in a new war that will do away with the Communists," they complained. This complaining was frequently heard.

The complaint was justified. Except, the Communists did not say why the majority of Hungarian society was so ungrateful to the Communist system. They did not say that the people didn't feel that everything that occurred was the consequence of their own enterprise, because everything took place not in the interest of the Hungarian people, but that of the Soviet Union and the small detachment of hired Mafia sent to Hungary – thus that of the Party. A revolution that a society brings into being through its own will can be bloody, ruthless, and corrupt, but this kind of revolution, it is certain, is an ordeal which the people execute in their very own interest. Hungarian society rejected everything devised by individuals who acted at the command of a foreign power, and when forced to choose between the interests of Hungary and those of the Soviet Union, they chose the Soviet's unconditionally and slavishly. When someone cast this charge in the Communists' face – and occasionally it was possible to do so in the first two years of the occupation – the Communists, shrugging their shoulders, replied that this was true, but, according to their belief, the interests of the Hungarians and the Soviet Union would, after fifty years at the very latest, be completely identical.

People began to turn defensive. They didn't defend themselves by "conspiring" but with their beha-

vior. Communist tactics prescribe that those who are not Communists but are useful from the system's viewpoint in some field of work must be compromised. Thus, position, role, and honors or other such bones must be tossed to them with lures and promises, and then they must be used as long as they are needed, or they must be broken in to serve submissively, without grumbling, in the camp of the mamelukes. ("Mameluke" is a Turkish word meaning a purchased slave.) If they don't toe the line, such persons must be buried in the dungeons of social annihilation, of declining livelihood. Or they must be forced to go into voluntary exile. And the individual who can't be bought, bullied, or forced into exile must be physically destroyed. These are the practical directions for use in the Communist handbook. But during the time of the first round, only a few succumbed to the strategic and logistical troop movements of the Communists' guerrilla war.

I arrived home in a hurry because I didn't want "my country's open arms to wait in vain." But immediately, abruptly, I had occasion to be amazed at how little we, the contemporaries, had prepared for the timely criminal attempt. After all, when you come right down to it, if one is compelled to go to Sumatra and live there, it makes sense for him first to read up on the history of Sumatra, buy a map, and get familiar with the archipelago's geography, hydrography and climate. If someone is forced to live in the kind of system which the implementation of Communism threatens, he behaves rationally when he familiarizes himself with the rudiments of Communism and its tactics. A technical book — *A History of the Communist-Bolshevik Party*, published by the Foreign Language Publishing House in Moscow — reveals with astonishing candor what the Communists are actually up to. It was surprising how few in Budapest read this book, though the Communists distributed it at a really low price; I believe it cost three forints. It was prepared for ordinary

people, and it disclosed with clear, matter-of-fact reasoning what Communism wanted and how Communism was to be put into practice. It was like a technical book on agriculture.

It instructs contemporaries on how to eradicate "fellow travelers" – these are Lenin's own precise words – in other words, the Girondists, the revolutionary intellectuals or specifically those tending to anarchy, the Narodniks, the Mensheviks, and the Social Democrats. It duly prescribes the timetable when the plutocracy and, in general, private ownership are to be done away with, then the schools, the kulaks, and the resistance taking shelter in religious sentiment. With simple objectivity, the calendars give information about the prehistoric era of the Russian workers' and peasants' movements, those of the 1870s and 1880s, the role of the "legal Marxists," the first Socialists, and the romantic bourgeois intellectuals – from the very first Lenin maintained that the true enemy was not the "capitalist" but the compromising Socialist – and one morning newspapers announced that the Hungarian Social Democratic Party had dissolved, it had merged with the Communist Party.

It was surprising that the book prescribed the enactive directives at a slower tempo than that with which they took place in the captive countries. In those countries, Communist agents injected Communism into the body of society in dosages as if they were conducting experiments on animals. In Russia, thirty years were needed for what was portioned out in Hungary in three years. Immunology predicates that a large dose always precipitates antibodies; this is how the constitution protects itself against excessive injections of vaccines. (In political-technical terms, the Communists called this antibody a "reactionary force"; it was a *re-action*, an answer to an action.) In general, everyone was considered suspicious who was possibly a bacterial host, the carrier of the bacterium of liberty

in his consciousness, because anyone who had already resisted the Germans aroused the suspicion that he was also objecting to another dictatorial system, Communism.

For this reason, the Communists ruined the livelihood of those who were suspect. Or they hauled them off to prison and exterminated them. They accelerated the dosages because the system did not want to evoke sympathy for those it had decided to ruin. In Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Rumania and Bulgaria – as in the Baltic states earlier – the Communists did not care about the sympathies of the inhabitants. The plans which carried out the dictatorial undertakings in accordance with orders adhered to the same model with monotonous tedium. The official who worked out the enacting clauses in Moscow reckoned that what was expedient in Warsaw worked just as effectively in Budapest or Sofia. The diversity of human beings, the variety of types, languages, cultural complexes and ways of life did not interest those who drew up the plans for the Bolshevization of the occupied territories. Sometimes the very same decree appeared in Hungarian newspapers, then in the Czech, Bulgarian and Rumanian Communist press. The Grand Plan which the specialists in the Kremlin formulated into a masterpiece did not have the time to concern itself with fine differences in details.

8

This was the time when two new concepts were first voiced in the jargon of contemporary history: the "Iron Curtain" and the "Cold War". A fine stylist, Churchill, composed both of them, and he knew what he was talking about. After all, he was the one who in Moscow wrote on a scrap of paper and handed over the particulars for the sharing of power in Eastern Europe on a

percentage basis. Later, diplomatic diagnosis determined that the "cold war" was the product of Stalin's imperialism, which sought to upset the balance of power in Western Europe. And the rooter, the anonymous European citizen observing the turning-points of the great match from the sidelines of history, must acknowledge that this plan was not entirely without hope at the time. The Stalinists wanted to foist Communism onto Western Europe, so that, whenever and however possible, they could control the sources of this continent's industrial and technological power. Later, Stalin wanted to penetrate into the Mid-East in order to realize a centuries-old Russian dream of establishing a key position in the Mediterranean (Stalin didn't live to see it, but this grand plan became a partial reality a decade later) and then expanding it farther toward Africa and the Far East. When America began to demand that free elections be held in the countries of Eastern Europe, Stalin feared that the "security zone" which, so the Communists believed, these Bolshevized vassal states symbolized for the Russians would slip from Moscow's control. (This fear on the part of the Russians was not entirely without justification, because they had twice suffered heavy attacks from the West in the present century.) In addition, a Messianic obsession drove the Russians: to spread Communism beyond Soviet borders. When America once understood this, the political and ideological defense collectively called the "cold war" commenced.

So the sages said later. But at the time I, along with a hundred million of my East European contemporaries, did not understand these tactics. When the Communist imperialism of Stalin and the Stalinists provoked what was at first an intellectual, moral, and later, here and there, physical opposition (as in Poland, East Germany, and Hungary), they behaved incomprehensibly in the eyes of contemporaries. Presumably, they would have achieved greater successes with

Communist tactics that were non-aggressive and disguised as "Socialist" – in the satellite countries and then in the West and other places as well – than with the tactics of compulsory Communism carried out with terroristic methods. After the Second World War, the moral and material collapse was deep and elemental everywhere in Europe. People understood, cynically or fearfully, that the illusion coated with the thin humanistic glaze called "Christian culture" was actually the code-name for the sadistic absence of inhibitions. This staggering realization compelled not only the Marxist opium smokers but also those whose descent upbringing and class background induced a critical attitude toward Communism to take stock. At this time everywhere in Eastern and Western Europe there were well-meaning individuals who assumed that after a purgatorial, initial period, Communism, with all its symptomatic flaws, would provide the opportunity to create a new, more humane civilization. Moscow's aggressive imperialist policy quickly sobered up the hopeful and also the uninformed. The detachments of Stalinist terror stayed in place, as did its guerrilla bands of looting mercenaries who, voracious, sometimes boastfully volunteering, sometimes perverse and capable of anything, cast their lot with them.

By this time a few enlightening books on the Stalin "purges" had already appeared in the West. Witnesses who fled to the West from the show trials, from the clinic-like, pathologically public "confessions" – among them Communists who supplied information about the inhumaneness based on direct observations – wrote books, and these publications produced a reaction. Official Communist propaganda, of course, angrily disparaged this documentary literature, denigrating the authors as apostates, paid renegades and scribblers hired by the imperialist powers. But as time passed, the suspicion arose that the Stalinists – then too, as later – secretly rejoiced at these exposés be-

cause the books not only occasioned the indignation of fellow travelers in the West but roused fear in the masses. Witnesses spoke in them with convincing proof, broken individuals who at one time believed in Communism and then had to see what the system is in reality. And they testified that Communism will not put up with any criticism, deviationism, liberal revisionism. It has no need for "idealistic, passionate followers" who later suffer disappointment because the reality disenchants them, and it crushes mercilessly and systematically all those who conceive the reality of Bolshevism differently from the way the orthodox Party demands and construes. These exposés were useful to the Communists, who plan with sound strategy and large perspective. For, to the man in the street, they asserted with reliable evidence that opposition is futile. It is not possible to put up a stout defense against the methods and instruments of the system. The Communists knew that this system could be made to function only in an atmosphere of perpetual fear, and for this reason they loudly reviled but, secretly rubbing their hands, approved of these books that informed the large masses of the reality and irresistible power of the terror. They did not want and could not even hope that a person of sound mind would appear who would come to know the reality of Communism and then still remain enthusiastic about it; they were content with the trustworthy documents, with the threat that generated fear in the victims. This way did well-meaning anti-Communist writings have tables turned on them, and Communist tactics were aware of this. They were not afraid of not being loved. They feared only that someone who did not fear them might turn up.

The messianic Slav obsession can only partially be the cause of the ruthless, aggressive Bolshevik tactic deployed with the swiftness of lightning that provoked the Cold War. Actually, the Communists did not

fear the West, which they considered to be corrupt, spent, and maniacally hungry for security (and they were often right about this); they were not afraid of the fascists either, with whom, if times changed, they could always come to some understanding; rather, they feared their own system, Communism. They knew that a social system brought into existence through deceit and violence can only be sustained if the deceit and violence are perpetually maintained. And for this there is never any other way, only the permanent threat of terror. They felt trepidations about the domestic situation in Russia, which changed fundamentally after the Second World War; after the first three decades of total ignorance and isolation ensued the period when masses of soldiers returned home from the West, having seen that other systems and methods can create the good life and conditions worthy of humans more quickly and successfully. The intelligentsia's restlessness that materialized in this thawing, more informed atmosphere was only an external symptom; the Communists could suppress the dissatisfaction of writers, scholars, and artists disenchanted by the Communist system with police instruments. In effect, the Communists feared that pressure might be exerted from below in the Soviet Union. (As happened in Hungary in 1956.) This kind of pressure was irresistible, like a natural catastrophe, like an earthquake. This was why they made haste everywhere – in Hungary, too – to implement Communism. Time was on their side, they knew, only as long as they could stir fear in the masses. They were afraid that one day people would stop fearing fear (in terror's schedule this moment has a designated time) and begin to protest.

The Communists were ruthless, and they made haste, among other reasons, because the battery radio made its appearance in history. The role of the radio as a shaper of history has really not been assessed.

The battery radio, which informed everyone simultaneously in the remote regions of great realms about what was happening in the world at that moment was a historical force. One of these radios could expose shabby lies within a moment – for example, that the thoroughly obsolete and untimely assumptions of a utopia formulated a hundred years ago could be put into effect in behalf of the working masses a hundred years later.

The Communists brought Nazis to trial at special courts of martial law called people's tribunals, and executed the Nazis who defended themselves by claiming that "they were only following orders"; or if they happened to have a need for men without inhibitions, they commuted their sentences and drafted them into the cadres of the Communist police force. Since they, the Communists, demanded of the "little man" the same thing as the Nazis – the unconditional, uncritical compliance with orders – they also feared those who complied because perhaps the proselytes suspected that blind service to the system of ruthlessness could also turn against them in critical periods of the Communist system. They were afraid of everyone, and panic is always the squalid offspring of fear.

Panic showed in their glances, their conditioned official discipline and their manner of speaking. Above all else, they were afraid of their employer, the Chief Inquisitor and his staff, because they knew that terror follows from panic, and terror has an upper limit, when humans become indifferent to fear. At such a time the Chief Inquisitor needs a scapegoat, and so he first gets rid of those who subserviently carried out the heinous deeds he had ordered them to perform. And so, unable to protect themselves against fear by any other means, the Communists resorted to the only protection available to them – terror.

I lived in this atmosphere for a year and a half. I set it down because I came to know this atmosphere

not from hearsay, not even from books, but from everyday experience. I returned home from the West because I wanted to write in Hungarian freely. I quickly learned that there was no longer a way to do this. I decided to remain silent and bide my time until I ... But then I learned that Time cannot be counted on with certainty either; in vain are the Russian forces with their tanks withdrawn one day the distance of a few kilometers; they remain at Csap and will return on call to help the Communists in a scrape, who now have received the order to turn the country into a colony and Bolshevize it for Moscow. The gong sounded, the performance began. Not the intermission, but the drama itself. Still, I did not want to leave Hungary. I continued to live in Budapest for a year and a half. These eighteen months formed the strangest, most enigmatic period of my life. In this year and a half, I became acquainted with Hungary.

9

For, I now learned, I did not really come to know my country until then. I had merely been born and had lived there, but knew her only the way a person "knows" his fated partner, the lifetime companion of his choice, or his close relatives. One just lives among and with them. And sometimes life slips by in a way that no real "getting acquainted" takes place.

I cannot say how it began and what it actually was that began. I can't recollect the day, the occasion, when I first noticed that my relationship with the surroundings, the country, the people had changed. The ruins were being cleaned up, and people hustled about to make a living. I didn't have any personal worries. A writer – who is he? There was a time when I believed he mattered, not just because, maybe, "he can tell us what people are thinking", but because the formu-

lated, expressed experience sets off conceptual processes in individuals that ultimately turn into action. As a result, human coexistence changes, the principles governing human life alter, and then, through their transmission, the conditions of public life, of civilization are modified. It was in such a bombastic way that I conceived the duty of the writer to be, and perhaps there were periods when writers could exert influence on humans to this effect. But at those times institutionalized falsehoods were not yet stifling everything and everyone.

From the balcony of our temporary accommodations we could look down on Gül Baba's tomb and the gardens of Rózsadomb, and farther away, between two rows of houses, down below to the Danube. The country stretched along the banks of the river; it could not be seen from the balcony, but one could continually sense and smell, practically breathe it in the way one breathes in the ocean even when he doesn't live right on its shore. Suddenly, everything became closer, more palpable.

Such changes don't have names. I can't say it was as if "night had suddenly fallen." Rather, it was like the parts of the day when it is still bright, but the light which had till then illuminated the region cheerfully and vividly suddenly becomes more solemn, turns, so to say, gloomy. People took notice and, like the light, like the landscape, grew somber. But they didn't want to believe the time of change was here. Things will be different, they said. With hand over mouth, they protested that the West cannot surrender Eastern Europe, give one hundred million souls to the Soviet. A decision will be made – an agreement, they hoped. Western radios also promised this. This was the time when opposition newspapers were still appearing. Book publishers and theaters had not yet been nationalized. The Communists were operating cautiously, with a stopwatch. They opened up the na-

tion's body joint by joint, like a learned professor dissecting parts of a body at an anatomical, demonstrative examination. They still spared the more vital organs; they still didn't sever the more essential nerves, but they were already cutting and slicing the viscera with scissors and forceps.

No one knew how deep this dissection of something alive would go. Sometimes it seemed as if the Communists themselves didn't know exactly how deeply they could reach into the living body with the scalpel. They received the order from Moscow; probably they also received the practical executive command for it; but at the same time they were afraid that despite all the scrupulous conscientiousness, the final responsibility belonged to them, the specialists, those whom Moscow had dispatched to Hungary. If something went wrong, if the patient bled to death or screamed, they had to answer for it. For this reason they worked for a year and a half like the spider weaving its web. ("Like the spider feeling the web's vibration," writes Arany in *Prince Csaba*. This is how he characterizes the security structure of Attila's realm.) And this is what the Soviet structure was like, too: the Giant Spider in the Kremlin wove and spun the web, and when its victims moved, it felt the web vibrate.

It was a time when a spider's web seemed to cover everything. The web grew thicker and stickier every day. One couldn't always sense this directly and immediately, but the Spider emitted a thread every day – now the textbooks and schools, now a decree on public works. Then the house wardens, the official cobweb of ever smaller controlling zones, the control of private lives, the workplace, the garbage disposer, family life. One day the Communists made a man disappear, the next an old, tested institution. Or an idea. Every time "the web vibrated," the Spider and his little spiders glanced around. Will what they did work out all right? Did they do well? What is the temperature of

the opposition? Suddenly they sniffed toward the East and the West. Maybe the West is not after all as deaf and indolent as they hoped it was. Maybe it will intervene, protest, and demand compliance with agreements. When nothing happened, they heaved a sigh of relief. The spider's web – invisibly but constantly spinning – thickened. And this Spider didn't pause to rest. It cast forth its threads unflaggingly.

Anyone who hasn't experienced it cannot imagine what this spider-web technology is like. When emitting its smothering, all-enveloping threads the Spider works silently. What was so natural yesterday – political parties, freedom of the press, life without fear, freedom of individual opinion – still existed the next day, but more anemically, the way the elements of everyday reality continue to live on more pallidly in anguished dreams during the night. (It was still possible to travel, but only a few did so.) The self-employed individual, the anonymous hero of the time, persisted in believing that he had the right to stay in his establishment and stick to his trade. The lawyer argued his case, the doctor waited in the consultation room for his well-paying patient, the *aurea praxis*. Things will be different for us, lisped the progressive intelligentsia, blinking. But the middle class, like the peasants hiding stores in pits during the war, began to prepare to defend themselves.

The intelligentsia, the "citizenry" – as they were sometimes called contemptuously, with belittling remarks – resolved to survive what was threatening them. Its members did not comprise a social, political organization. The same instincts were stirring in human beings as those found in the old Saxon towns where, with strength, strategy and cunning tenacity, the citizens tried to outlast the Turks, the pro-Austrian Hungarian soldiers, or the oligarchy. Or as did the lower nobility the Germans during the Bach period. This was not a "movement," it didn't have a slo-

gan or party symbol, but it seemed as if the Hungarian intelligentsia had decided at an invisible "routine election" not to succumb. They wanted to survive what was threatening them.

Some of them shed tears for the china cabinet and the baubles that were destroyed by the rain of bombs or, during the siege, by the Mongol Invasion. Others mourned the stocks and bonds, the memberships on boards of directors, the privileges of government counselors. But these were few. The vast majority of the intelligentsia did not mimic servility and flattery; they remained what they were, modest and self-respecting. They couldn't afford a new suit of clothes, but wore with conscious respectability clothing that became threadbare during the war. Not to display their loss of a role or to conceal penury but to remain individuals of standing, yes, a "citizen" even in tatters: this was their mission. Most of the modest, dismal bourgeois houses were destroyed or heavily damaged; for this reason the intelligentsia crowded together in one of the nethermost versions of the circles of Hell, one that not even Dante had dreamed of — the co-tenancy. Without a word or complaint they began living in some kind of outwardly half-bourgeois, inwardly half-"prole" life. (They didn't complain, because it was always only the "proles" and "ladies" who did so.) The intelligentsia went to the pawnshop, sold their gold teeth, the old nickel-silver watches to buy food or medicine. Or a book. (They still bought books.) Not the worker, not even the peasant — the middle class, which had been stripped of everything, still bought books. They parted with their pocket watches more lightheartedly than with their books, when necessity finally forced them to sell those, too, for whatever price they could fetch.

The nimble-tongued, droll-mouthed, caustic-humored inhabitants of Pest turned particularly serious. Everything that had recently still been a caricature

changed. The behavior of people, their relations with each other in the human sense altered. No one believed in "classless society" as advertised on showbills, like a popular play from the nineteenth century. But a certain social layer understood that without them there can be no society. I couldn't say exactly how it happened and what happened, but I began to feel at home in Budapest, the way I had in Kassa long ago. As if I belonged somewhere. The "alienation" Marx predicted did not take place in Hungary precisely because of the Communist peril. Perhaps never, in any danger zone, was the Hungarian intelligentsia so deliberately cohesive as in these months, in the early stages of the Communist takeover.

No "social life" existed; after all, the indispensable home, job, and setting were lacking. Sometimes this "social life" consisted only of a handshake, a wink of an eye in passing. Individuals, half-strangers, approached each other with signals, without questions and explanations. Like living creatures generally, if danger threatened the tribe, they didn't inform each other about the danger with words and oratorical declamations but with shortwave messages. No one knew exactly to what precipice, dark labyrinth, or fetid pit the daily surprises were leading. But everyone knew they had to protect themselves. There were those who protected themselves by joining the Party, because they wanted careers. Some sort of indefinable, anonymous and silent summary court martial immediately passed sentence on those who did this. And the sentence was not subject to appeal; those who erred noticed that others spurned and scorned them wordlessly. There were those who joined the Party gloomily, with clenched teeth and downcast eyes, because they feared for their jobs and their families. People gave these weak chaps the cold shoulder, but they not infrequently forgave them on the grounds that they acted not from their own interests but from dire

necessity. In instances of common danger, every degree of protection was countenanced, as well as accommodation to circumstances and feigned acquiescence. They knew who was truly pretending when someone acted in concert with the Communists, and if personal circumstances forced him to do so, they did not judge him severely. In times of great danger, human beings know about each other's secret intentions with a mystical radar beam. The Spider thought he knew everything about those he had lured into his web – and it is certain he knew a damned lot about them. But the intelligence of the victims was not inferior. If they sensed in someone that he submitted to the Communists with clenched teeth, for appearance's sake, they didn't pass sentence on him; sometimes they even encouraged and helped him with tactical advice.

But if they felt that someone really supported the Communists, they froze him out. Job, livelihood, school for the children – all this was overwhelmingly, truly in danger: he had to save whatever he could every day. And yet, there was something more important than a job, a livelihood. There is something that to most humans is more important in an emergency than everything they can lose in a severe test: self-esteem. After the many mendacities, the shabby, tattered travesties, people now perceived the reality: the danger that some wanted to force something on them that they did not believe in. They wanted them to accept sincerely something that they despised. They wanted to take from them their remaining human dignity, which is more important than a social role, a good life, a career: the right to be humans, human beings building and renovating society according to their own beliefs.

For this is what the Party wanted: to suck from the victim everything on which human self-esteem is based, like the Nazis in death camps, where they forced their victims into a subhuman level, because

they not only murdered and worked them but first, at the very least, attempted to make the victims lose their own human sensibility, their sense of human dignity in the course of tortures and humiliations. Ultimately the Nazis contented themselves – “modestly” – with the physical annihilation of their victims. The Communists wanted something more and different: they demanded that their victims remain alive and celebrate the system that destroys human sensibility and self-esteem in its victims.

10

Every caricature of the recent past evaporated: the snobbish hierarchy, the nasal “listen to me, my friend” manner of discussion, the sham haute bourgeois lack of culture, the hunger for honorific titles and social ranks. Sometimes even I didn’t feel myself to be a caricature any longer. When one gets right down to it, a “middle-class writer” was a nobody, a nothing in this world. I thought the Communists forgot about me the way one does a piece of out-of-fashion, outmoded furniture. I began to entertain hopes.

I went down to the swimming pool in the mornings and swam several laps conscientiously. I no longer went to Margaret Island to play tennis, because the siege, as if by magic, had turned the beautiful island into a romantic, exotic bower; the plants, running wild, luxuriated around the ruins, and the coach had vanished in the historical whirlwind just as my tennis racquet did and with it my other self who played tennis every morning. This was comforting to me. After the swim, I drank a cup of strong espresso in a café on Margaret Boulevard and lit a cigarette I bought in the corner tobacco shop; there were already cafés, coffee, tobacco shops, and cigarettes again. Then I strolled across Kossuth Bridge to Pest, where I had absolutely nothing to do. Along the way, I encountered

acquaintances who didn't have anything particularly to do either. Not long ago one of them was a government minister, and now he plied the inner-city streets with a sack flung over his shoulder in search of cheap victuals. Another was a writer not long ago, and now he roved the streets in a fright, searching for someone who would believe he was still a writer, even when he no longer had the opportunity to write freely. The third was a woman not long ago, and she once again strolled the streets in her war finery, painted and be-feathered in search of someone who would believe she was still a woman and not a female impersonator. And the fourth and the others I met were all somebodies not long ago, and now no longer were. This was how we knew each other. But rarely did anyone make accusations or complain.

That easy self-confidence which a settled and anthropomorphic system with all its imperfections denoted for the people slipped out from under them. No one knew for certain any longer what "class" they belonged to, because the notion of class became strangely muddled as eager-beaver snobs dug the titles of nobility out of family limbos of the past, and others flaunted the hastily unearthed locksmith grandfathers and weaver grandmothers. Like someone crawling on all fours in anguish during the moments of an earthquake and feeling his way with his palms, people searched for some kind of social security in their daily lives. The caricature evaporated, but the sardonic tableau of the New Class abruptly appeared in its place: the frockcoated *sansculottes*, the bureaucracy of pigtailed mercenaries.

I no longer wrote my "program" for newspapers and journals; as radios put it in moments when enemy planes approached during the war, I "went off the air." The clamor in the papers and journals was earsplitting. I did publish a travel diary in book form and two volumes of the trilogy I wrote during the war also ap-

peared. I wanted to depict the demonism of the philistine, plebeian anarchy of the Hitler period in the novel. The Communist press laid down a line of fire against these books. A Marxist philosopher who returned from Moscow – he was a renowned Communist man of letters, an international celebrity – was designated to write a lengthy treatise on the novel analyzing Hitler's world; this indignantly mud-slinging study presented the individual utterances of the novel's protagonists as if they reflected the author's opinions. At first reading, I found it difficult to understand what provoked the cool, supercilious Marxist critic to froth so bloodily at the mouth; but, in the end, the true significance of the venomous piece became apparent with translucent phrases. The condemnation of brute force, the analysis of the totalitarian mind-set infuriated the Communist critic, who applied what I wrote about Hitlerian savagery and totalitarianism to himself personally and took it all as an assault conducted circuitously against the Communists. It didn't deserve a reply, because the noted philosopher apparently heard only what he chose to, hence his own voice. (I didn't publish the third volume of the trilogy; it is still collecting dust in a desk drawer.)

I terminated my program; I wrote for the desk drawer; thus I worked as I would have sometimes liked to in my days of caricature in perfect solitude, without reaction, and still close to a language community from which bitter disappointments and painful experiences had sometimes separated me in the past. I lived like a person who no longer has the opportunity to speak to someone, but finally has the chance to be silent with someone.

Not much time elapsed, and everything altered dramatically in social concerns, as if a society had begun a migration within its inner sphere. People quickly renovated their ruined houses but then did not find their place in the patched-together home. Others

took up residence together sometimes grotesquely in the comfortless hedgehog conditions of emergency habitations; sometimes three families squeezed into a single flat, leading a social life in the living room and serving supper in the kitchen. Some were found among these changed circumstances who, feeling out the possibilities for the conditions under which the middle class subsisted, no longer had the real opportunity to salvage anything from their old way of life. No "social life" existed, but the middle class, with obstinate and systematic perseverance, tacked together a way of life in which it was possible to move only with elbows pressed against hips, but which, even in this state of cramped helplessness, provided the means for a small social community to preserve a consciousness of its function. The aristocrats vanished; change and time eliminated their role and lifestyle. The intelligentsia knew that the technological revolution would squeeze the peasants and the workers out of their workplaces and way of life; the peasants would leave their lands and become proletariats, the workers would leave their factories because automation would take the tools out of their hands, and the megapolises the world over would receive new social strata resembling old spheres of action only on the basis of affluence. The intelligentsia knew that they were indispensable. They just had to bide the time, from which they now were expelled with malevolent bullying.

They waited. They carried everything they could do without to the pawnshop, then also whatever was indispensable. They ironed their shabby clothes mirror-bright again and again, because they were unwilling to dress as "proles" in the labyrinths of daily existence; they always wore bourgeois clothing. In what were travesties of apartments, next to the few old essential, glued broken furniture, they fiddled with furniture rescued somehow from their homes in Upper Hungary, Transylvania and Transdanubia, from the

spotless rooms of vanished generations; and these worn bits of middle-class furniture preserved a cultural setting which was in its conservatism always only defensive, never offensive. The old customs of social intercourse, the polite address and the uncomplaining, benevolent change in voice also went with both the day-to-day stratagems of "having to survive" and the strategy designed for the long term. (They were courteous in ways different from the marquesses and duchesses waiting for the hangman's assistant in the cellar of the *Conciergerie* who, with the grotesquely distorted simpering of the Versailles *lever*, stood in a line before a bucket where in the morning, pretending to make their toilet, they could dip their fingers.) They were courteous like those who know that for them conservatism, the respect for tradition, was not only a day-to-day game of patience and healthy calisthenics, but the scope of their historical duty; if they did not plead for mercy or complain, if they preserved from their past, their beings, their culture that energy which tradition transmits and without whose driving power evolution cannot occur, then the system of violence will be forced to turn to them, because it needs them.

A Hungarian intellectual middle class existed in Upper Hungary, Transylvania, and Transdanubia, most of whom, for all practical purposes, emigrated to Budapest and remained nearly invisible there. Now, when they were dismissed from everywhere, the emptiness they left in their place was blatantly evident. In every field of activity there was a quiet, very poor, barely visible "intelligentsia" whose expertise, integrity, and humanness the Communists were unable to replace through their cram-courses. They were the "consciousness" of the nation – not the "people," but an intelligentsia without titles, ranks and estates. They didn't belong to any sort of high-sounding political party, not in the past, not now either. They had no political clique. The only cohesive element for them was

that culture which they inherited and loved, which they didn't display ostentatiously but, yes, concealed modestly instead. I knew their apartments; the apple smell of their dark vestibules lingered in my nostrils; I saw the homemade preserves in jars placed atop cupboards, and in their rooms the plush sofa and the inlaid oval table or pipeholder with green billiard cloth rescued in their exodus from Bártfa, Kassa, and Kolozsvár (my father still had a pipe-holder; it, too, was destroyed in the rubbish pile of the house on Mikó Street). Were they "progressives"? Yes, but in a way different than the supporters of radical change desired. They preferred to read Mikszáth rather than Zsigmond Móricz, but they knew that Babits was a greater poet than Gyula Vargha. They did not "progress" anything, they preserved something instead. They bought books, they purchased the inexpensive season tickets for the theater, they subscribed to the newspapers. There weren't many of them, but without them no Hungarian culture was possible. The puffed-up "bourgeois" neo-baroque scenery concealed them, but now this scenery crumbled, and the time had come to test the fire-fighting equipment, now when it was possible to see the reality. The intelligentsia in Hungary never was a sharply discernible segment split into political parties and ideologies; they amounted only to a root layer. They were too few in number. Not many had answered the call of the right wing in the time following the senseless cruelty of Trianon (again, only this anonymous middle class actually paid the cost of Trianon in Transylvania and Upper Hungary); just as in Germany and elsewhere, it was the uneducated plebeian petty bourgeoisie who flocked into the extreme right-wing parties which had neither the tradition nor the education to reason objectively. Truly, in Hungary, only two kinds of persons existed in the political sense: the liberal and the non-liberal. And this liberal Hungarian intelligentsia remaining

from the Hungary of the nobility and stripped of their privileges, a middle class reduced to professional penury, assumed a role without an ideological program. They decided to bide their time until they would be needed, because without them despotic power was impotent. They wanted to help – first themselves, then the nation – without helping the Communists at the same time (like the best of the returned emigrants later.) But it was very difficult, sometimes practically impossible to draw that dividing line. (The Communists often derived benefit from this impossibility.)

For the time being, everything that was considered to be a parvenu excess in the past was destroyed, and the naked reality emerged in its place: poverty, just as in the West. I don't believe in the solidarity of the proletariat. On the other hand, zoologists know that mutual help exists even among crows. I believe in the solidarity of shared poverty. And now, when the tempest tore holes in all the fancy scenery, when society shed its buskin and costume, it made manifest the solidarity of poverty. Hungary, "the Canaan flowing with milk and honey," provided milk and honey only to a few; to the working intelligentsia it never gave anything more than the bread of charity. And this silent, uncomplaining middle class of poverty – readers, theatergoers, the educators of children in ways exceeding their material means, the decent Hungarian middle class inconspicuously preserving the traditions of social intercourse which was scornfully and superficially confounded with the gentry and the parvenu lout – this intelligentsia did not take action either inwardly or outwardly. They did not lament, they did not complain. It seemed as if a cultural class of the nation, its intelligentsia, was serving notice that debate was meaningless, that one cannot dispute with destiny. Destiny was now near, visible. What was this destiny? Loneliness.

No other people was still living in Europe that

was as stifled by loneliness as the Hungarians. I don't know how our "relatives" the Finns feel. It is said that many depressed souls and suicides are found there, too. Some attribute this to the northern climate, to the dimensions of this vast and frightfully empty country of forests and lakes, to the geographical isolation: inhabitants live far from one another and sunlight is scarce. Perhaps this explains it. In Hungary, however, the loneliness was different: it was a shortness of breath, an asthmatic lack of air. For a thousand years, a people roaming in the vicinity of Europe sought someone it could speak to in confidence. It never found anyone. (There were fellow feelings: the Italian and the Pole sympathized with the Hungarian, but their good intentions never grew warm.) Hungary's great kings and powerful statesmen, from St. Stephen to István Széchenyi – then its artists, from the Guardsmen poets to Árpád Tóth, searched for the road to the West for centuries. Sometimes the West seemed close; all one had to do was speak to it and it would answer. But in reality, it never did. That mystical link which in the political or constitutional sense calls peoples into solidarity never materialized. The consciousness that being Hungarian meant the same as being lonely, that the Hungarian language was incomprehensible and unrelated to other languages, that the "Hungarian" phenomenon consisting of diverse races but still typically Hungarian was also foreign to those who were next-door neighbors and shared a common fate with the Hungarians for a thousand years. There was something benumbing in this consciousness. Sometimes, for a brief period, at times of shifting currents of civilization, hopefulness befogged this feeling of loneliness. But it did not last long. The Hungarian was constantly compelled to learn anew that there wasn't a people in Europe to whom he could speak in confidence, who was willing to undertake a joint responsibility with him. And now, when a hostile great power – the effemi-

nate, pertinacious Slav – grabbed his dismembered country by the throat, he realized suddenly, in an alarming flash that there was no one, near or far, he could count on.

Maybe America, some said, stuttering in panic. Maybe the West, some mumbled in startling ignorance. (I returned from the West, and I brought home in my nostrils and nerves that benumbing lethargy, impudent hostility, and arrogant superiority with which the West viewed the fate of Eastern Europe.) Slowly Hungarians began to realize there was nothing to wait for, nothing to hope for. Nowhere was there a people who were willing to gamble a diplomatic initiative, to utter a serious and true word in behalf of Hungarians. When this became clear to them, the feeling of loneliness engulfed everything, like the liana the ground in the jungle. And loneliness poses a great danger: the danger of turning karstic, of erosive marcescence threatens everyone – the individual and the people – in the loneliness.

Escape, if there was any, could occur only inwardly. As is always the case with loneliness, the "Hungarian" could only hope for an ally within himself, inward. And during these years, in this time of their consciousness of historical loneliness, something spoke up within the people. The loneliness will not make anyone "better". It is not true that loneliness "ennobles." Rather, the lonely person will be more frigid, colder though stronger at the same time. Loneliness is destiny. But it can unearth sources of strength unknown in times of self-deluding optimism and illusory hopefulness. I began feeling at home in Hungary because this loneliness spoke in everything and everyone – to me as to everyone else. And the "people," like the individual, knew that this loneliness could not be altered, because it was destined. And so they – the people and individuals – tried their hand at being lonely in a practical and methodical way.

"*O beata solitudo*," sang St. Francis. And then he added in a groan: "*O sola beatitudo*." The saint who in his own day, in the beginning of his career, was a "hippie" and only later became Saint Francis through complex transpositions, overstated the matter. Loneliness does not bestow happiness. But the loneliness of Hungary was a source of strength, an oasis in the European desert. With its fate, its good and bad characteristics, a people was left tragically on its own between the East and the West. This people listened to radio broadcasts from the West. Some continued to hope. Others were silent for long periods of time. Then, because they could not do anything else, they set about fashioning order in the loneliness.

11

“... Unstable as you are, beware, for Order itself
is precarious
The stag has gone mad in the maple grove
Anarchy peers but through the dark foliage
Drops of blood seep down from the eaves
Music, geometry and civil law
No longer keep the world in order
Tonight the wanderer prowls in a trenchcoat
Sharply the wildcat screeches and the flowers
shudder...”

12

Troubles with civil law were observable; seemingly, music and geometry continued to maintain order in the world with their old authority, but not for long. The Communists laid their hands on music, too; they "rated" it. The Euclidean laws of geometry also wobbled, because the Communists were in a hurry to replace everything quickly; sometimes it seemed as if

counterpoint and the truncated pyramid were not the same as they were in the past. They wanted to make everything disappear, or to refashion, to kneed whatever reminded anyone of the past into something new-fangled. Lysenko announced the "new genetics," and everything seemed possible through this Marxist mode of scientific observation, including the transformation of human nature by means of environmental influences, or the squaring of the circle. They announced the arrival of the New Order. Possessing a disorderly nature by temperament, I took notice, because I knew from experience that order quickly turns into system, and this is dangerous.

Bridges were constructed. Streetcars stopped obediently at the terminal, and the conductors walked with the handbrake from the back of the car to the front to resume the route. Hangover-like weekdays followed the euphoric anarchy of the time after the siege. In that period, when there was no state or agency able to act, people, oddly enough, found their bearings through some sort of personal, subjective statute. No system existed anywhere, but the signs of a personal, functional capacity appeared. Everyone did only what came to their minds and what was possible. People discovered without obtaining a trade license that they could resole shoes, repair plumbing and mount window shutters, that the structure of living together, though without the seal of authority, functioned nonetheless. That strange propensity for anarchy that lurks behind sclerotic civilizations like a puma in a jungle did occasionally let out a snarl. This period of time didn't last long. After a few months the official System commenced: statutes glared from the walls, police strolled the streets at night (sometimes they were more dangerous than those whom the powers-that-be entrusted with their supervision); a Tax Office, Land Registry and Auditor's Office were set up. But

there was no longer a viable human order. The system asked for leave to speak.

Bells were installed on house doors, and phones rang in the houses. Both rang frequently: the compulsive spasm of hatred eased; people wanted to get close to each other again. Our phone rang and the Great Actress chirped away at the end of the line: she cooed, twittered, whimpered, whispered the latest news into the phone. And she invited us to dinner. (Gizi was perfect on the telephone, better than on the stage: in physical projection, she never conveyed self-confidence, but if she could hide behind the folding-screen of the telephone, her voice was plastic, airily self-possessed, and affected every nuance with perfect intonation.) Yes, they have already found a flat. And Tibor, her husband, finally obtained that post at the clinic and is now a regular university professor. What would we like for dinner? Is there anything particular we want? Because she, Gizi, can arrange everything with Rákosi just as she had yesterday with Horthy. No, we didn't want anything special, but we accepted her invitation. The actress had pasted together an apartment in the Inner City; she had hastily furnished a temporary three-room fairy castle out of ruined discards. It wasn't a real apartment or home; it was, rather, a stage set, because to a capable comedian the home is always also a stage with wings. A man in a white jacket served the dinner, and we drank French champagne with cottage-cheese and noodle dessert. During the dinner her husband – a taciturn, genteel and engaging being and an excellent physician – went over to the surgery in the adjoining room and removed a child's tonsils, but returned in time for the demitasse and sat silently among us and with the attentiveness of a perfect host saw to it that his guests enjoyed themselves. ("Tibor is happy now," said the actress confidentially in a low voice while her husband was at the surgery, "he has finally achieved everything he ever longed

for.") Tibor returned, poured brandy into the glasses, smiled and listened. The actress was a perfect hostess, too. But at the same time she was a consummate actress and behaved like someone who is in a new part: yesterday she was the amulet of the conservative world; now the new masters, the Communists, were here and so she was performing for them. Her husband was silent, like someone who was himself a guest in the lovely flat hastily thrown together. There was a moment when the smiling, courteous and disciplined man looked me directly in the eyes: in his look shone such an unexpected and surprising question, an almost despairing wink of the eye that it remains fixed in my memory. Like that of someone who wanted to say something, to cry out, but then he turned away, looked at someone else and changed the subject.

Later, they returned our visit. Again, Gizi chirped and cheeped away, again Tibor was silent. Then they left Budapest and I never saw them again. Two years later I read in a newspaper at an Italian railway station that Tibor poisoned Gizi, who died immediately. Then Tibor committed suicide, but he almost came off badly, surviving for a few hours. Fortunately for him, doctors were unable to revive him, and he, too, died at dawn. Apparently Gizi was mistaken when she said "Tibor is happy now" – the apartment, the hospital were not enough; he wasn't completely happy, after all. And that look, the unexpected, aggressive, shouting glance that he fixed on me during the conversation was revived in my memory.

Order was established by now, but many could not bear up under the Order well. One night the telephone rang again and the wife of a physician friend of mine was calling for me to go immediately to Rókus Hospital, because her husband, a noted neurologist, was dying: he had injected himself with ten cubic centimeters of scopolaminic morphine, and though the doctors tried in vain to revive him, even by slapping his

face; there was little hope of saving him. It was near dawn, but I managed to get hold of a taxi and went to the hospital, where my friend lay unconscious in bed with upturned eyes. By noon his eye reflexes were functioning. The next night he was already talking. This doctor didn't have to worry about making a living. The Communists treated doctors circumspectly, prudently; they needed competent specialists. They didn't exact a profession of loyalty from my friend either. He was the head physician of a hospital and an adjunct lecturer; he had a highly reputable private practice, and his house was not damaged during the siege. To the day of his attempted suicide, he tended to matters at the hospital, issued instructions, kept himself busy apparently contentedly and, yes, cheerfully. He lived the old life, subscribed to foreign periodicals, bought and read Hungarian and foreign books with fastidious selectivity. His father was a highly respected judge in Upper Hungary, a descendant of the Hungarian middle class which upheld strict order and guarded status. I asked him why he attempted suicide.

Two days had passed since he had been pulled back from death's door: he was already in possession of his faculties and spoke composedly. I could sense in his voice that he spoke willingly about his attempt at suicide; he felt the need to confess. (And it evoked sympathy that even on the edge of the abyss he remained a medical specialist and could speak about his own catastrophe without self-pity. He spoke with a dreamy, relaxed voice, the way women do after orgasm, when they are sated and before falling asleep they murmur a few words of gratitude. Possibly, there is in suicide this kind of orgasmic gratification also.) He said: "I was afraid." I asked him what he feared. With closed eyes, as if he were speaking half asleep, he said: "Do you remember the Oxford Program?" I faintly remembered it. Then in my mind flashed a recent conversation of ours when my neurologist friend asserted what

he had just read in a Western periodical: in England, after the war, the highbrows discovered the only "solution," the Oxford Program, in short, the well-meaning, idealistic English pipe dream which cherished a society where individuals have the means of retaining their freedom opposite a state desiring only slaves, to retain freedom which makes it possible to preserve one's personality intact while in the service of social justice. I now remembered that we had argued about this issue not long ago. But I didn't understand why he was reminding me of this argument when, deathly pale, he lay in a bed in Rókus Hospital. I asked him what the Oxford Program had to do with his getting here. He replied reluctantly – he underlined every syllable – that he was "afraid because humanism no longer existed." I took issue with him. A person doesn't attempt suicide to make someone aware that "there is no humanism." When and in what life experience was "humanism" ever found in times past? Strong individuals also lie to themselves and to the world when they are afraid. I didn't believe what he said. He repeated with fixed lips: "I was afraid." And then he began talking with eyes closed. He already believed, so he said, that he had passed through the *choc*, the perturbation of the war and the siege. Already everything around him was again in "order," he was living as before. Then one night (he was listening to a Mozart record, he was a passionate *mélomane*) suddenly, without cause or pretext, he felt fear. He began to fear that in this world he was no longer what he had been, because he had lost something. He said this like the writer and newspaper editor who one day was struck with horror in a cellar prison among the Russians because he perceived that in this system he as a separate person no longer exists; the individual dissolves. This was how he spoke, and then he suddenly fell silent, like someone who feels ashamed of himself. Without a word I left the private ward.

The doctor on duty approached me in the corridor and escorted me across the suicide section toward the exit. In this ward lay in long rows of beds those who swallowed lye, who tried to string themselves up, who jumped off a bridge, who opened gas taps, the everlasting cripples in the tragedy of the big city's refuse who, independent of the historical time, wander single file toward daily, voluntary destruction. The doctor reported that now there were more suicides than during the war, more than in the period immediately following the siege, in the first month's of the Russian occupation. (A few years later, Hungary headed the list of suicides in Europe.) He said that earlier, before the siege, it was possible to make a diagnosis with tolerable certainty: the social situation, stereotypical changes of fortune determined who, when, and why suicide would be attempted. The disappointed lover, the person potentially powerless in the fisticuffs of social success, or the one who sought "revenge" when he tied a rope around his neck or turned on the gas – not long ago these tragedies were still being repeated with monotonous obstinacy. But now, the doctor said, many suicides, when asked why they wanted "to make a getaway" – this was how he put it, using the hoodlum's remark of the Rókus Hospital – replied most often that they felt they couldn't take things any longer because they were "afraid." And not one of them could say precisely what they were afraid of. Fear seeped into the consciousness of people like odorless, tasteless asphyxiation. The suicides in Rókus Hospital, when they opened the gas tap or climbed up to the eagle on Francis Joseph bridge, did not fear for their jobs (after all, most of them were unemployed beggars) or for their social position or sweetheart. Whom and what did they fear? Something happened to them – to everyone – which they did not understand. And this incomprehension was so frightening that many escaped it through death.

One day I traveled to the small baroque town in the provinces where formerly, during the war, when it wasn't possible to leave the country, I found a bit of that "urbanity" of Upper Hungary which was lacking in Budapest. The small town was famous for its good wines and for the fact that, being the seat of the bishopric, the priesthood held all social and economic power in its hands. Internal social changes in Hungary had terminated this unhealthy situation independently of the Russians and Communists: lands, vineyards and estates were taken away from the archbishop and destitute families were moved into the long row of lovely baroque canonical houses. I was struck, though, by how slightly the archbishop's power could be reduced. I arrived on a holiday celebrating the Virgin Mary and found people preparing with great zeal for the arrival of Cardinal Mindszenty. They had gathered for three days in the little town by train, wagon and foot. They hung out on the steps of the cathedral, bartered goods from knapsacks, then struck camps on bare ground everywhere in the town, and families slept under the open sky. Presumably, those were not mistaken who insisted that in these days about a hundred thousand pilgrims from every province of the country flocked together around the cathedral. The population of the town tripled for several days.

I walked around in the crowds and looked at them closely. Most of them were beggar-poor peasants, men and women with children without shoes and boots. I saw feet which had altered after the long tramping in the dust of the highway, reminding me, rather, of some animal's hooves, a rhinoceros's hooves. The massive crowd squatted silently around the cathedral, munched what they had brought from home, and waited. They waited for Mindszenty. At this time the cardinal from Esztergom — one year after the "conspiracy" — was as prominent a figure in the country as were the priest princes in the old days; one could sense

in the bewildered excitement of expectation that if this priest would raise his hand and give the signal, the fanatical crowd would attack the carbines of the police and sweep everything away before it. But the archbishop did not give the "signal," and he could not do so. He arrived and the vast crowd kneeled down. He began to preach – he spoke about the "melodious hills" in a priestly manner – he stood high above the crowd, and the majority had a hard time understanding the symbols of the speech sprinkled with pontifical embellishments. What they did understand was that they were afraid, and that the cardinal was also afraid.

What were the hundred thousand impoverished, barefooted pilgrims afraid of? And the other cotters, the million who stayed at home in their hovels? The Communists beguiled them with the promise that they would give them land; using propaganda's every form of argumentation, they instructed them that now everything was taking place to serve the interests of the poor working people. Still, they were afraid. Were they afraid of the Slavs? The Communists? Did they fear for their pigs, for the grain they stowed away in pits? Were they afraid of the inspector of the flour mill, the controller of threshing, the policeman who appeared in the place of the plumed gendarme and monitored the people's mode of life and conduct with precisely the same relentless rigor as their predecessors, the gendarmes, had? One cannot know for certain what they were afraid of. But they huddled together and kneeled on the pavement and gazed up at the priest as if, by way of the cardinal's robe, a demand had become incarnate in a man. As if they felt that time had thrust an extraordinary platform under the priest: a man had resolved to proclaim a demand, the right to freedom of conscience. Perhaps the crowd that was afraid felt this. They fell on their knees, moaned and invoked God. A hundred thousand souls felt that the moment of the great test had arrived, when they

had to confess that the only thing remaining to them was the hard-to-define idea to which religious and philosophical systems give various names but call the "soul" in the vernacular. (And very few turned up among the hundred thousands and then the millions who could determine what the "soul" is – the idea to which the Greek "pneumatologists" gave another meaning, and Dewey still another, the American philosopher and pedagogue who said: "The soul is the Word.") It is impossible to imagine what the kneeling pilgrims at the Eger fair understood by "soul" and "freedom of conscience." It was only certain that their voices faltered and moaned because they were afraid.

Perhaps they were also afraid of what was constantly dinned into their ears through loudspeakers from the Central Office: now every day of life was no longer an ordinary Monday or Tuesday but lasting history. No one knew exactly what history is, but there was something sinister in its threat. Toynbee, in his eightieth year, maintained that the future cannot be inferred from the study of history, because it is not certain that what human beings did under identical conditions in the past will also materialize under identical conditions in the future. Humans must resign themselves to the fact that history is unreliable and arbitrary, like everything that mankind produces. For this reason people began, instead, to pay attention to the weekdays. And behind the humdrum, current interpretation of history the other, the true history loomed.

13

Lola related it like this:

"Dudrás gave my grandma a massage every morning at six o'clock. Everyone in the house in Kassa was still sleeping; only the servants hustled about in the kitchen, kindling a fire, washing the dishes left

over from the late supper and setting the large extendable table in the dining room for breakfast. Sometimes this table remained spread for twenty-four hours. The used dishes were removed and the crumbs brushed off the table-cloth, but there were times when someone always ate, breakfasted or had a snack at ten, lunched, took tea, or had supper, because the family was large and, besides, there were those who belonged to the family semi-officially and ate at our place, dropping in at unpredictable times. For this reason it wasn't always worth resetting the table. However, the servants set it early in the morning, always for at least twelve, sometimes for more.

"Dudrás was an old woman, and her daughter did sewing at the manor houses. Dudrás came at six, while the house was asleep. She tiptoed the length of the rooms. The house had many rooms, because it formerly was the office of the Court of Appeals, and anyone who didn't know his way about could get lost among the rooms, doors, and alcoves. Dudrás was at home; she didn't lose her way and went directly to Grandma, who was snoring under the down comforter. She didn't wake her up; she pottered around in the semi-dark room, put the bottle of alcohol next to the bed, took a swig from the bottle, and then, without a greeting, she reached under the comforter and began massaging Grandma's abdomen with alcohol on her hands.

"This was the alarm clock. Grandma woke up and called out from under the comforter: 'Dudrás, don't drink,' she said sleepily. And she slept on. 'I won't, madam,' said the masseuse hoarsely. But this wasn't true; everyone knew she drank. Sometimes she poured a little alcohol on her hand, sometimes she took a swig from the bottle. She was called Dudrás because she spoke grouchily and mumbled; after all, she got soused before her arrival – she stammered slightly, in short, she "*dudrált*." But she massaged expertly,

and actually Grandma woke up only later under the comforter when Dudrás was already finished with her abdomen and turned her over in bed, because she began pummeling her back and thighs. This took half an hour. Then came only the sort of dietetic pre-breakfast that Grandma – still in bed – could quickly gulp down, to help her regain her strength after sleep and the pummeling and so should feel like getting up.

“This wasn’t simple to do as you might think. Grandma was a heavy person, and even Marienbad didn’t help with her weight; she went to bathe in Bohemia in vain; she always returned fatter than when she left. But she was a finely built, stately obese person. She was beautiful even in old age. True, she took care of herself. That is why she began the day at dawn with the masseuse.

“When Dudrás finished with the different parts of her body, Grandma got out of bed, put on her negligée and sat down at the dressing table, because the hairdresser was already on her way. The hairdresser didn’t drink like Dudrás, but she talked incessantly. While she combed, curled and scented her hair, while she readied the *Einlage*, the newspaper with which she tested the hot curling iron – there were two kinds of curling irons, a wide one which crimped her hair in soft waves from her forehead to her nape and a narrow one which curled her bangs – she talked constantly. Hairdressers know everything, and Grandma’s hairdresser was no exception. But she also set about things. While preparing the *Einlage* for Grandma and curling up her lovelocks, she had to tell her about everything that happened in the neighborhood and possibly also that which didn’t but could happen. When she finished, Grandma sat before the mirror with her dressing gown over her shoulders in full fancy coiffure like Victoria, the English queen, when she opened Parliament.

“Grandma consumed her second breakfast, the

real one, in her room also. Servants brought her a china cup and a pot of coffee and milk, fresh rolls and jam and butter on a silver tray. And the *Neues Politisches Volksblatt*, on whose front page an illustrated drawing showed the latest horror, the victim in his blood or the derailed express train. Grandma always suspected that she was not the first one in the house to get the *Neues Politisches Volksblatt* in her hands in the morning, because living next door was another, a foreign old woman who was poor and couldn't subscribe to the paper, and so the servants, in complicity, sometimes secretly lent the new *Volksblatt* by seven in the morning to the grandma next door, who glanced through it avidly and then handed it back with a sigh for them to take it to the subscriber with the breakfast tray. Grandma still grew up with a respect for private property, and when she found out that sometimes someone looked at her newspaper before she did, she was indignant. But this was only a passing, morning vexation. Grandma enjoyed her breakfasts. On the whole, she enjoyed eating. After the massage and the coiffure, she sat down comfortably to breakfast. With spectacles on her nose and wearing a pretty lacy morning wrapper, she ate and read inquisitively; she alternately took a bite from the buttered roll and one from the newspaper. Of course, the servants also put francs in the coffee, no matter how much the residents of the house grumbled – one cannot depend on servants not to put a spoonful of francs in freshly brewed coffee. Was this an act of 'prole' revenge, or superstition? It surpassed understanding. Grandma had already wearied of constantly having to call someone to account for it, and she acquiesced to having francs in her coffee. This was how she breakfasted; she read slowly and with interest about who had been murdered.

"After breakfast, the chambermaid came in, carrying a large pitcher of hot water. Mademoiselle sometimes also helped to wash and dress Grandma.

Mademoiselle had been with us for a decade, and after the First World War an Italian officer – one doesn't know why, but before the Czechs arrived, the Italians also occupied Kassa – took French language lessons from her and then left without saying goodbye, which produced sad consequences. But no one spoke about this. Mademoiselle belonged to the family, at least that was what we children were told – unlike the servants who belonged to the household; indeed, according to Grandma, they were 'hired enemies,' though they lacked for nothing. After Mademoiselle got over the Italian officer, she stayed on with us for a long time and we shared her grief. Then she returned to France and vanished the way *Fräuleins* and *mademoiselles* generally do when they complete their missionary assignment in barbaric foreign countries. The purpose of the mission was for Mademoiselle to teach us, the wild young ladies, French and Western proprieties, and for this she received very little pay but belonged to the family. In reality, we, the wild young ladies, whose upbringing our parents entrusted to her, didn't learn French as well as she did Hungarian; and in the end, it wasn't we who became French but Mademoiselle who became Hungarian. When the servants began to dress Grandma in the morning, Mademoiselle most often also came into the room, because the task was not a simple undertaking and required an assistant.

"Sometimes, already, we children were permitted to enter Grandma's room for the dressing, which made us extremely happy because the sight was a grand to-do. Grandma kept up with fashion, but in the twentieth century she still retained some of the oddities of the nineteenth. She always dressed ceremoniously, not only when she expected to receive callers at home, but at other times as well, for instance, when she went out for a walk, because she felt she had to keep up appearances. Grandpa was the chief medical officer of Kassa, the free royal city, and of Abaújtorna

County, and when he passed away at the beginning of the twentieth century, Grandma felt she had to maintain her rank in her external appearance, in her attire out of respect for Grandpa's memory. Since Grandma had twelve children – in her day women did not take pills but constantly gave birth – the garments she wore were made from out-of-date patterns, like the uniforms of soldiers, who do not change styles, because, after all, they must always be ready to go to war and die. Grandma, likewise, was always ready – not for war but for life, thus to give birth immediately to a new child in place of the one that died, and so she never changed dress patterns. We, the children, if we were admitted, would sit on the sofa and watch happily as they laced up Grandma, because that was as good as a matinee at the theater. Grandma always dressed elegantly, even in the morning, but she was conservative.

“The chambermaid and Mademoiselle grunted and sweated while they dressed Grandma. They had great difficulty with the corset because Grandma had a large waist; for this reason, the chambermaid and Mademoiselle tugged at the corset cord from the right and the left respectively, while Grandma stood in front of the large mirror and groaned commands in a choked voice. When they had laced her up, they had to pull on her shoes, but this wasn't easy either. In her corset Grandma was already like a statue; she couldn't bend down to pull on her shoes herself. So the chambermaid struggled with the shoehorn, while she somehow managed to force Grandma's foot into the shoe; then she buttoned up the three shoe buttons with great difficulty with a hook, because Grandma preferred three-button oxfords. She always bought a beautiful hat with a feather, if possible, and a veil, and it had to be fastened on her head with a hatpin. The point of the pin poked through to the other side of the hat, and Mademoiselle fastened a protective cone on this tip,

out of humanitarian concern. The entire dressing process was complex and ceremonial, just as the morning ceremony in Versailles may have been in the time of Madame de Maintenon. By the time they were done, every one of them was gasping for breath, Mademoiselle, the chambermaid and Grandma, too. Only we children on the sofa were happy, because the occasion was all such great fun for us.

"But they were most often finished, in spite of everything, by ten o'clock, and then Grandma pulled on crocheted half-gloves reaching her elbows, hung a reticule on her arm and headed for town. She descended the stairs slowly, like a battleship leaving the harbor, and we watched her through the balustrade like contemporaries an historical figure. When she emerged from the gate, passersby and then shopkeepers in the neighborhood greeted her with low bows and doffings of hats, because there was a liturgical solemnity in Grandma's bearing. She walked slowly, she couldn't have walked any other way; she smiled graciously, returned greetings with an inclination of her head, and everyone was pleased because such a splendid grandma was walking along the street. People in the town still remembered Grandpa, the doctor whom everyone respected. On the chest of drawers in Grandma's room the family's pictures were lined up in a semi-circle, first those of the living and deceased children, then those of the sons- and daughters-in-law and grandchildren, including the picture of Papa and Mama's engagement: Papa in a first lieutenant's uniform with two stars on its collar patch, because at the time of their betrothal he was still an active army officer and only later resigned his commission, when he married mother, but they couldn't put down the peacetime marriage security, the thirty thousand Francis Joseph solid silver forints, because it was a lot of money at the time. And there, in the middle, enlarged, stood Grandpa's picture in an ornate

frame, showing him dressed for the silver wedding anniversary in a silk-faced frock coat, an open starched collar, a black bow tie, a gold chain hanging at his chest, bearded and smiling as is proper for a good doctor, the family physician who knew and was acquainted with the city's family and physical secrets, the mysteries of laxatives and heart drops, everything hidden under the frocks and corsets of men and women. In Grandpa's time, doctors still did not wear white coats when they received patients; rather, they dressed in black frock coats and draped gold chains across their stomachs. Grandma, when she appeared on the street, stirring so much respect, evoked memories of Grandpa.

"Before she went to the Women's Society, where she was president, she dropped in at the local butchershop, Freudensfeld's, and standing and wearing her gloves, she ate a serving of ham with a buttered roll. Eating ham was one of Grandma's weaknesses. Like a drug addict, she couldn't break the habit when she passed in front of the butchershop. This mouthful of ham at ten o'clock was her weakness, this unneeded but soothing narcotic. We spoke about this in the family with sighs; indeed, everyone knew that argument, admonition were futile, just as the dope addict can't be broken of the opium habit with sound reasoning.

"The butcher knew this and grinned broadly when Grandma entered his shop and stopped in front of the counter in gala attire. Nothing had to be said. A large sign above the entrance to the store proclaimed that 'This is the chief outlet for Kassa's gammon.' Most passersby didn't know exactly, and neither did Grandma, what the difference was between 'gammon' and 'ham,' but those who entered Freudensfeld's weren't interested in semantics; they only wanted ham, fresh ham. And they got some, some superb ham. For Grandma, old Freudensfeld cut a fresh gammon

every morning, and while his assistant quickly sliced a roll in two and buttered it, the butcher trimmed with the point of his knife the excess fat from the tip, from the end of the ham and placed the tasty, pale pink, mildly cured, and tenderly cooked end slices between the roll's two halves. Grandma – standing in place, in gala attire and gloved, hat with feather and pin on her head – devoured the ham and roll. She didn't sit down to it; rather, she hurried, knowing there was something in her mania for ham that wasn't quite decorous. When she swallowed the last bite, she smiled coyly, like someone ashamed of her weakness but unable to do anything about it; the passion was more powerful. The butcher watched her contentedly as she stuffed herself with ham in the early morning, flung the door wide open, and bowed deeply. This was her snack every day on the way to the Women' Society.

“Grandma walked down Main Street and returned greetings with a gracious smile. She stopped occasionally – the way a battleship slows down during a naval review – exchanged words with acquaintances, but only briefly, because at the Women's Society were waiting for her the ladies with whom she walked over to the People's Kitchen to serve lunch to the poor. Every morning after the ham she went to the People's Kitchen and pretended to taste the lunch for that day. But she didn't do much else for the poor because unfortunately, Grandma had a very low opinion of them. She believed the poor were lazy, didn't want to work, and, in addition, told lies and stole. As in many things, Grandma was possibly right about this. However, she suppressed the antipathy she felt for the poor and went every noon to the People's Kitchen, where the row of ladies had already cooked the meal for the poor, soup with millet, and added a slice of bread. Hatted and half-gloved, Grandma dipped a spoonful of soup from the large pot and pretended to taste it, because she had a social conscience; only, she was social in

ways different from Marx. She praised the soup, and then she magnanimously inquired how the poor were doing and whether they needed anything.

"The poor, in their characteristic way, always needed something, but at the same time they knew that her friendly inquiry must not be taken too seriously, because they wouldn't get anything more than soup and bread anyway. So they just groaned, rolled their eyes, kissed her hand, and acted as if they had no need for anything more out of life than the soup that they received through the generosity of Grandma and the other ladies of the Women's Society. Grandma listened to the poor, and she also heaved a sigh, because she knew from experience with a long life that the poor rarely tell the truth and that, in general, it is very difficult to help humanity. She served several ladles of soup into bowls, and then, like one who has done her duty, she said goodbye graciously and headed homeward.

"In the meantime, she sometimes stopped in front of the Megay confectionery and ordered a cake for a birthday, wedding, or name day. The family and the neighborhood were so populous that seldom did a week pass when someone wasn't born, didn't marry, graduate, or go on a long trip and then return from abroad... A cake was always needed. (On Grandma's seventieth birthday, the piano was loaded with gift cakes, and later, what was left over was, with social intent, sent to the poor.) When she finished with that, too, she went home. In her room, now alone – because the chambermaid, the general servants and Mademoiselle were bustling about in the dining room – she removed her hat, pulled off her half-gloves, washed her hands, put rice powder on her face, and meanwhile looked at one or another of the framed family portrait gallery lined up on the chest of drawers in front of the mirror: Frici, who fell in the First World War; Rucsi, who was a lawyer and died young; the portraits of

daughters who got married in America. She sighed because it was sad that these dead and the far-removed would never again sit down around the dining table at noon. But then she nodded repeatedly, because she was wise, as grandmas generally are, and entered the dining room, where the family had already gathered and waited until they could sit down to the well-laid table.

“Not only Papa, Mama, we children and those of Grandma’s still living children who happened to be home – not only the clan had lunch at our place, but also the private tutors, teachers, and also occasional guests who were the needy members of the middle class, whom Grandma invited to lunch out of charity. One could never know exactly how many would be present for lunch, but the extendable table was so long that it could always accommodate one or two additional guests. After greetings, Grandma took her place at the table, and we, the members of the household, and the guests hurried to sit down, because in those days no one dieted and everyone was ravenously hungry at one in the afternoon. The chambermaid and the general servant together carried the large soup tureen in from the kitchen, and Mademoiselle served the soups into dishes with a ladle. Grandma sat at the head of the table, Papa and Mama to her right and left respectively, then the rest of us by rank, the clan and the little newcomers. When every dish was filled with the steaming, savory golden-hued meat-soup – which also contained liver dumplings – Grandma looked around sternly to see if everything at the table was in order. Then like a choir master, a spoon in her hand, she gave the signal, and we hurried to clutch our spoons.

“At such a time, there was, for a moment, a devout silence in the large room. Grandma immersed her spoon in the soup dish, and we all suddenly imitated

this ceremonial movement of her hand. We began to eat.

"We thought we were having lunch. Later we realized that it was 'History.'"

14

"My father, if he were still living, would have a Jewish identity card," said Krúdy's son, when, directly after the siege, I encountered him in the Rudas steam bath. The building itself, with its cupola dating from the time of the Turkish Pashas, was undamaged; only bomb blasts shattered into splinters the tinted glass panes slitting the cupola – the fissures through which the sun poured red, blue, yellow, and green shafts of light into the steaming water of the swimming pool. The shapes soaking in the mist, like crocodiles on the stewed-fruit bank of a tropical stream, were phantoms of a myth: they remained here, in the Rudas bath, from the mythically blurred depths of recent Pest. Then on the bank, in the taverns in Óbuda. In the sour-smelling cafés of Pest. Everywhere where one could remember that another Hungary once existed.

Krúdyism, without any premonitory signal, unexpectedly flared up in Pest. It spread like a fashionable opiate. Those who had never read Krúdy's writings, didn't even know his name also availed themselves of it. Most of the taverns in Buda and Óbuda escaped unscathed. Perhaps the Vörös Póstakocsi, the Red Mail Carriage, the star of taverns, stood watch over these one-storied, pagan sanctuaries, the star that Krúdy wrote about, the one that guided the homeless in the direction of the haunts of reconciliation and assuagement. There was a period of fifty years when Hungarian writers wrote in the cafés with full awareness what they, languishing, had such nonsensical dreams about in the taverns, because they didn't have

a "home" in the same sense as in the West. The taverns and cafés were the Hungarian Parnassus -- sometimes quite literally, as in March 1848, when a March poet-youth wrote about the Pilvax that "the café became the temple of liberty."

This sudden, widespread Krúdy-sectarianism was the kind of mania that a narcotic produces. People became addicted who had never gone to a tavern before then, didn't drink wine, and didn't trudge to a steam bath toward dawn to mope, to get rid of their tip-siness there by soaking, and, under the hands of masseurs, in this sweaty, stained sensuousness, to get ready for the miserable banks of the nirvana in Pest, where -- on the shabby couch in the chiropodist's chamber -- they slept through the morning and kept putting off the time when they would have to step from the stupor into the sphere of everyday dreariness. Krúdyism was an escape, an awakening and a torpor simultaneously. It became evident that many fled deliberately and methodically from loneliness and hopelessness into Krúdy's world. He was the writer who thoroughly scrutinized and then conscientiously described this other Hungary. And in Communist Budapest nostalgia for the other Hungary broke out among the people.

For there had been another Hungary. Not the swaggering manorial lord, not the beggar, the adobe shack. Not even the bourgeois bogus gentleman class of Pest, where -- if Móricz's novels could be believed -- actually, the minister's councilor was only a middle-class "prole;" after all, at night, after attending the theater, when he got hungry, he went into the kitchen and scraped the solidified fat off the bottom of the frying pan with the point of his pocketknife and spread it on bread...

Krúdy's Hungary was different from the one Jókai and Mikszáth described. In another region of the world, his landscapes would have been called surrealistic in modern technical terms, but most of his

readers did not have the faintest notion of what surrealism was, and in all probability he didn't either. He simply wrote and created a surrealistic world where another kind of Hungarian lived differently from the way the world knew. So, when the trashy agents of a foreign power set out to disperse everything that represented the old Hungary, people looked around in alarm and thought they had found a refuge. This was Krúdyism.

At this time, the legend surrounding Krúdy's life and death had already turned into a myth. Inveterate rakes bragged that they "knew" him, that they were sitting with him at the tavern table when he uttered one or another of the famous Krúdy sayings: "What can four decis be like?" or "the deceased has no tobacco." Most often, such a claim was merely boastful ostentation, because not every nonentity of a part-time journalist or compliant, huckstering man of letters could sit down to Krúdy's table as a kibitzer. In Krúdy's day, the hierarchy in the writers' world was more rigid than the one at the Spanish court: everyone had a fixed title and rank that only the initiated knew, who then punctiliously honored this rule and didn't violate it. Krúdy had a court like a pagan prince, and those in this household granted the right to appear at court carefully stood on guard to make certain that no stranger intruded into the mythical circle. In the writers' world, success, renown, social position have no meaning; there the order of rank is more rigidly fixed and scrupulously guarded. When Krúdy died, there was no longer any electricity in the ground-floor flat on Templom Street, because he couldn't pay the bill. In his clothes closet were found a threadbare suit, shirts with frayed cuffs, and a few dozen of Jókai's works. He had nothing else. During his last years, he lived in abject poverty, gravely ill, in the last stage of alcoholism. (In Hungarian literature, the pathologically sick alcoholic, in the clinical, constitutional sense, was rare.

Csokonai, maybe, Vörösmarty, maybe during the last years of his life. Afterwards Ady, Cholnoky and Krúdy. Géza Csáth was addicted to morphine, Kosztolányi to cocaine in his last days. The rest just tipped.) Krúdy's alcoholism was incurable. His doctor, a learned physician at the Jewish Hospital, struggled with him affectionately and hopelessly. The hut in Óbuda where he died remained a typically Hungarian pillory. Krúdy always received shameful honoraria. He could never make money with his books, he had no interest in the theater, newspapers paid beggar's fillérs for his excellently written short stories and news headings. He couldn't "handle" money; the little that he obtained he spent on hansom cabs and taverns, and no one wanted to heed the fact that one of Hungary's greatest writers was living in a ramshackle hovel in Óbuda.

Bourgeois-capitalist Hungarian society (not the "intelligentsia," to which Krúdy also belonged) gave the cold shoulder to the fate of genius with more unfriendly self-centeredness, more idiotic indifference than the aristocrat formerly had, who, haughtily and peevishly, or just fashionably, did sometimes spend money on literature. The aristocrat, in the interest of realizing a way of life for himself, made rake-offs on the people with cynical selfishness, but he was not interested in "profit" as an end in itself. The bourgeois-capitalist, when he achieves power during some course of the free enterprise system, is greedier than the decadent and gorged aristocrat. (Then comes the time when the wheel turns and the trade unions raise greedy and unlawful demands in the name of the proletariat that has achieved power. Not one of them cares about the lot of the writer, the artist in society. But Krúdy did not live to see this course of events.) No one ever gave him anything. Through his lot it also becomes apparent how really poor twentieth-century Trianon Hungary was: everyone wanted, to the extent possible, profit from the extortion of labor, both the

state and the employer. And no one paid respectable wages for work.

Krúdy published his last works at his own expense, and unemployed, mooching pseudo-journalists hawked his books in the provinces. When – in the presence of a few night companions, writers and journalists – he was lowered into his grave, his lifework was also dead. All the more marvelous, then, was its revival ten years later. The phenomenon can be explained only by the nostalgia that suddenly broke out in a period suffocated by cobwebs: people understood and discovered that this writer knew and preserved another Hungary that was more enigmatic, more humane, sometimes more frightening and paradoxical than the real one, but it was *different*.

In his lifetime, Krúdy was not a “popular” writer, but writers respected him because they suspected that beside the puzzling, baffling conditions, a being lived in the nocturnal cafés and taverns who created something without precedent that was misunderstood, and unique just as it was. But the public and publishers, on the other hand, tolerated it squeamishly and patronizingly, like some oddity that has color, character but must not be taken seriously. Then suddenly, ten years after his death, readers came to their senses. The harp sounded Krúdy’s voice, and spoke of something “different.” What did he write about? In “Seven Owls” an old man moves back into the room of his youth rented by the month to experience the scene one more time and meet up, even if he is old, with those whom he had something to do with in some way or other during his youth – and the readers took note because in this retrospection human beings saw not just their personal youth but also that of the Budapest for which everyone was yearning. Krúdy proved that this kind of eerie retrospection can be something other than loathsome and disillusioning. (The old Mauriac wrote that “bodies make faces” in the

state of senility, but Krúdy demonstrated that familiar faces invariably shine behind the grimaces, that there was and is something at the base of our "experiences" that not even time can alter.)

Forty or fifty years ago Krúdy wrote his masterpieces for the newspapers of Budapest and the boulevards for fillérs. After fifty years, when his works begin to speak again, his literary power and greatness are almost past comprehension. This alcoholic doesn't have a single tired line, feeble simile. When he was twenty-five to thirty years of age, he was writing with the same unsurpassable assurance and somnambulant resoluteness as he did twenty years later, near the end of his life. He saw humans, dreams with an eerie power; he saw the other Hungary. In "The Countrywoman's Prize," the protagonist is a funeral director who mistakenly finds himself at a wedding and then in a brothel; there, in a schizophrenic scene he encounters his other self, Mr. Álom (Dream) and the two figures, a frightening set of twins, together roam about the beginning-of-the-century Budapest of the living and the dead. Suddenly Krúdy could speak about the mythical, about the "surrealism" that envelops reality, the actual, like interstellar, cosmic dust the planets. Few in world literature could so vivify the mythical in reality. The woman who gives birth to a child in a dog's den in the brothel's air shaft and lives her whole life over again while she is in labor – the perverts, the hopeless, the romantics, then the Hungarian landscapes in Pest and the provinces, the houses, the contents of clothes closets, the monomaniacal whims of human beings, the incomprehensible passions, the foods, the customs; and in these writings the refraction of his style illuminates everything, that nacreous fine mist that clouds the canvas in Turner's paintings or in Monet's paintings of irises. He never heard of "social realism," but he came as close to reality as Flaubert, Maupassant and the great French realists. His vi-

sions are mysteriously rich, like Proust's remembrances of time's depths. His plants and animals are colorful and authentic; he rivals much that important contemporary English and French writers wrote. When people finally dug him out of oblivion's rubbish pile, they behaved like the hero in one of his novels, the eccentric in Buda in "Golden Age" who guards the memory of a love and searches the cellars of Buda for the Rothschilds' stolen jewels. (The sibyl, the hysterical damsel of Buda are like a charcoal sketch, a Hogarth, fearsome, alluring phantoms, an atmosphere so dense with muggy-tropical fragrance that it could no longer be intensified.) In "The Templar," one of his strangest writings, Krúdy conjures up figures from the time of the Mongol invasion with the visionary power of necromancers describing the dead putrefying in saltpeter pits. Around the love of the knight templar and the nun are depicted the cannibalistic Hungarians and Hungarian landscapes laid waste by Mongols; human flesh is roasting everywhere, and this cannibalistic orgy is, in Krúdy's narrative, completely natural, almost a casual spectacle. With a few pencil strokes he draws apocalyptic scenes about sex, flesh, human cruelty and hopelessness. A man had walked the streets of Pest, with his head turned sideways, cane on his arm and almost always tipsy, and he saw everything that was "Hungarian" in the past and present. His words were so magically accurate, as they matched the force of very great poem in which words express meaning beyond reality.

Decades after his death, a society intellectually famished and spiritually trapped in mess-kit fare reached for books as avidly as at a time of great intellectual, ideological starvation when human beings obstinately begin to demand the Word that will become Flesh. They wanted to read about something "different," a different Hungary which – behind everything – was always there in the background – not the "roman-

tic" Hungary but the Hungary specifically distinct from any neighboring country. (Most readers misunderstood Krúdy's "romanticism:" he wrote about chiming clocks, about pathways on the Tabán, about women who strolled in the Inner City primly and shufflingly, as if they were still wearing the "bustle" fashionable in nineteenth-century stories – the little pillow they placed under their dresses back at hip level – as if women were still flirting from behind a fan, but all this was only a folding-screen, his way of glossing over sanguine reality.) Under the title "Woman Robber in Pest," he wrote about how in the eighties of the last century a young widow named Mrs. Kecsegi, who lived on Arany Street in Pest, lost her panties in the Serbian Church on the Tabán. This incident was attended by significant consequences, not just in the heroine's life but also in literature, because Krúdy set it down in writing and people, fifty years later, noted it amid their national anxieties and for a moment forgot their troubles and sorrows and happily sipped the story with its high alcoholic content and couldn't get enough of it. His sardonic and fastidious narration, knowledge of the world, high-minded and moody cynicism, the growl of his double-bass tone, this male voice, muttering and grumbling and at the same time raucously cocky, comforted, soothed, dispelled illusions and conciliated. If there is such a thing as "Hungarian loneliness," it is the loneliness of Krúdy's protagonists, and in the coldness and bleakness of Bolshevized Hungary, people paid heed to this humanely lonely voice. It was as if everyone wanted to hear once again about the other Hungary, the magical one where Mrs. Kecsegi lost her panties and then (and meanwhile and through a thousand years, sooner or later) one thing or another happened that a foreigner does not understand.

He wrote arrogantly, and the reader gratefully accepted this gift: the fact that only he, the chosen Hungarian reader, understood and shared this arro-

gance. (In 1916 Krúdy wrote: "It would be good to be living fifty years from now.") It happened. The liveliness, the bloom of his Pest and Buda commentaries, musings, and bits of gossip did not lose their freshness; they did not fade even under the wear and tear of half a century. He got so close to what he was describing – a street corner, a contemporary article of fashion, a human face – that he seemed to be sitting in the room and talking personally to his readers. This is the secret of all great writing. His resurrection in the critical period of a fettered Hungarian literature was one of the most extraordinary phenomena to occur in the country.

In the early afternoon hours of the Sunday that followed March 18, 1944, the doorbell of my flat in Buda rang. Poldi Krausz stood in the doorway, pressing an album wrapped in a newspaper under his arm. The Gestapo's cars were already making their rounds of the streets in Pest and Buda and picking up targeted Jews and individuals considered suspect by the Nazis. In one of the neighborhood houses, Bajcsy-Zsilinszky had in the morning already fired at a Gestapo officer who came to arrest him. Poldi Krausz was the owner of the Deep Cellar on the Tabán. This tavern was one of Krúdy's drinking haunts; Poldi was the bartender, a friend of Krúdy and other writers. He was a stubby chap, slightly built, stoop-backed, with a long mustache hanging down each corner of his mouth; he spoke Hungarian with the full flavor of the plains in Northwestern Hungary. He had pulled his cap down over his forehead and was standing like that in the doorway. His call surprised me because he had never before come to my place. I was often his guest on wintry nights in Buda. "Hide it," he whispered hoarsely, handing me the package in newspaper. "Someone turned me in. They are coming for me. Put it away, take care of it, guard it." His hand shook when he handed the album to me, his lifework, his only treas-

ure. In the album bound in oilcloth, writers, journalists, artists, night people, the knights-errant of Budapest's intellectual world wrote sometimes humorous, sometimes serious lines for him. The itinerant journeymen of letters and homelessness, this loyal society more faithful than any political or religious sect — these were Poldi's, the Deep Cellar's customers. Poldi wasn't crying but his mouth was trembling under his mustache. "Gyula also wrote in it," he said huskily. "Hide it. At least this will survive."

There is something unique in every life. Something on which one works his whole life, which one nurses, whittles, fondles. Sometimes it is an individual. Sometimes it is an obsession. This album was the masterpiece of Poldi Krausz's life, of the humble and penurious, always jovial, grousing wine-serving life of the tavern keeper on the Tabán. Now, on the threshold of annihilation, this is what he wanted to rescue. We leafed through the album. The signatures of the dead passed before us, then of those who were still living but who were in these hours already getting ready for deportation or death. And capriciously arrayed on the pages were the entries of the ancients, the classicists of the nights of the Tabán who had moved away. Krúdy had written half a page in the album in small, round letters (his hand never shook while writing, not even if he was tipsy). And others, an entire generation. I had written a few lines in it, too, and I now found the page.

I asked Poldi to take the album to someone else, because it wouldn't be safe at my place. (It was not a gratuitous request; the next day we left the house and went into the country, and when, after a few months, we trudged back to Buda after the siege, the pile of ruins greeted us in place of the apartment, in which books and documents lay about reduced to pulp. Arrow-Cross police, who broke into the rooms, trampled the manuscripts under foot; they used the pic-

tures and furniture for target practice, and they fired additional bullets into Lola's clothes closet, shredding her clothing.) I mentioned two addresses where perhaps the album would be more securely guarded. Later, I learned he didn't look up either one, and the album was destroyed with him when before long he was taken away together with his wife, Aunti Poldi, to the brick factory in Újlak and then from there to the death camp in Poland. Later, even from an enormous distance, from the remoteness of oceans, the memory of this moment sometimes appeared dimly before me: Poldi Krausz as he is going down the stairs with the album under his arm. He stops at the landing, looks up at me, standing a floor above and watching him. Then he heads down the stairs and vanishes. That was the last time I saw Poldi. And that was the last time I saw Krúdy's handwriting.

15

That "grain of madness" which Goethe talks about manifests itself differently from schizophrenic *choc*. When the split becomes reality, there is no immediate sign of it in the consciousness. It is like an extremely powerful electric shock pervading the system; the constitution doesn't reel it at the instant it strikes. Only later do we realize that something catastrophic and unalterable has occurred. So, too, with the "grain of madness."

The realization that the time for the "great separation" has come dawns only slowly. When someone who has been more important than anything else dies, we don't immediately understand what has happened. All kinds of other activities have to be engaged in: one has to mourn, talk with people and go to the funeral. And one has to live, eat or telephone. In the meantime, there is constantly "something missing." (But this is

not yet the "madness.") The consciousness still resorts to subterfuge and defends itself, just as human beings shy away all their lives from the realization that death is an absolute certainty. As if one could still hope that "something" will take place. What that "something" might be is inconceivable, but still, it is something. A new medicine will be discovered. The Security Council of the United Nations will pass a resolution. Then suddenly a person finds that he is old, and abruptly he becomes conscious, with all its consequences, of the fact that he is mortal.

I don't remember the moment when I realized – finally, with its every consequence – that I must leave Hungary. Nothing special "happened." The institutionalized deprivation of rights and ownership, the "nationalization" had not yet been put into effect. With a friendly office clerk, my publisher, which was still privately owned, sent me weekly the envelope, the royalty income for my books sold during the week, on which we lived modestly but without want. Newspapers still published columns in which literary criticism appeared. Hungarian literary critics of the recent past had already fallen silent; no need for their opinions existed. "Critics" appointed through Party authority spoke up in their place, among them some rotters, blackguards walking the streets with ideological medical cards who disparaged the lifework of meritorious writers, painters and composers before the general public and sullied intellectual creations prepared with lofty effort and greatest sacrifice in the subordinate clauses they spit at them. No one demanded to extend the classification as amateurs to the authority of literary criticism and the criticism of intellectual works in general. Ultimately, a shoe can be made only by one who was first a shoemaker's apprentice and later a journeyman shoemaker and who then passed the master's examination. Someone can remove a corn only if he gets through an examination

administered by a bathing association in the presence of a physician. A person can become a physician, a lawyer only if... and so on. But now, as earlier in the time of the Arrow Cross, every bungling good-for-nothing felt he had the right to deprive general literary knowledge of the works of poets and writers in insolent, irresponsible and dishonest indictments that they called "literary criticism." The rabble bayed in the agora. New authorities appeared, the Marxist critics who – like the bishop who chances to enter a brothel and solemnly dispenses blessings on the girls – insisted that literary evaluation now had new norms. Incompetent bunglers who never proved with any kind of original work that they knew the real meaning and task of literature, the great, sometimes heroic willpower that even the creation of a flawed literary work requires – these incompetents spat on the author and the work without restraint and sense of shame. And no one asked them by what right they dared to judge, no one spoke about the responsibilities of intellectual criticism. They considered literary criticism to be casual labor, like the washing of sausage casings to which everyone who happens to find the time has the right without special education. Occasionally, as in the time of the Nazis and the Arrow Cross, they aimed some poisoned arrows at me, but it was not worth paying attention to them. I heeded something else; I sensed that now and then, on the street or among company, I was looking at objects and individuals like someone saying goodbye.

When something calamitous, irreversible overtakes us, we don't cry out, we don't wail, we don't even regret what occurred. (At such a time we don't feel sorry for ourselves either.) Facts are never sentimental. I had rushed home from abroad because I wanted to live where people spoke Hungarian. I was resigned to the fact that for a certain time there would not exist the atmosphere for me to write for the public. I was no

longer publishing anything in newspapers and journals. I didn't miss the journalistic profession (it had been my bread and butter for decades, yet I was never fond of it), but I did miss writing pieces for newspapers – that mystical propinquity which makes it possible in a newspaper column within the dimensions of a twenty-four-hour eternity for the writer to tell the reader immediately, in that very instant, the notion, the playful interjection, the lyrical meditation that is currently troubling him. Eclectic writers look down on writing for newspapers. They retreat to their books with their messages, to journals issued in limited copies for a narrow reading circle; from there they address the faithful from the pontifical height with the preeminence of a shaman. The Parnassians and Purists want a hygienic atmosphere for writing in which the sterile thought reaches the sterile reader in a sterilized physical state. And there is in this demand something of the artistic ambition of the stone-cutter or classical Greek temples who carved the capitals in the dark side aisles of temples into masterpieces with the same care to details as they gave to the facial lineaments of the caryatids in the façade: they created the invisible, the incidental, the concealed with the same reverential precision as the conspicuous, the sonorous. There are always two kinds of writers: the one who creates his own public, the other who is created by his public. (In great, vital cultures, the writer and his public created the Work together; the one summoned the other, the writer the public, the public the writer, both of them the Work itself. In Athenian theaters it was not only the sophists, philosophers and playwrights who applauded Sophocles, but potters and weavers also.) But literature is a musical instrument with many pipes. Those "light genres" – the special article, the news heading, the colorful description of some sort of grotesque, frightening or cheerful phenomenon of the day, this instantaneous utterance, lighter than a

treatise but heavier than a report – are not as “light” as the reader or the purist musing in the ozone of the Parnassus thinks. It is “light” in a different way: like the feat of an athlete lifting a heavy object with the tip of his finger, as if it were weightless. Writing for the newspaper was this kind of bravura of genre in the Hungarian press, the artistic exhibition of splendid writers: they held up with completely easy movements the commonplace, the transitory which, at the same time, has fateful weight, and then suddenly it was evident that there was something magical, profound, and eternal in the transitory.

I missed contributing to newspapers because this genre in the Hungarian press enticed writers to compose ephemeral masterpieces whose perfection similar literary genres seldom attained in other literary quarters. In the cafés, the writer of special articles, the craftsman of “colorful” headings wrote little masterpieces between two cigarettes that sometimes gave news about the moment with such sparkling refractions of color and tonal strokes as did the classics of Great Literature, the Great Poems, the real ones – hence not rhymed, versified, diligent exercises, but Poetry. This possibility of distilling a literary form was also latent in the “colorful” literature composed for the newspaper. (The story, the anecdote, the debris of the Hungarian literary industry, the shoddy self-confessionals presented with convivial geniality appeared in the newspapers as by-products.) But the “colorful,” the mischievous communication of a few lines when writers related, in the morning or evening paper, in a distilled, miniature form what he didn’t have the opportunity to express in a novel or drama provided a great education and an excellent artistic opportunity for writers. During the first half of the present century, it was possible for the *feuilleton* to become a little masterpiece in the Viennese and Budapest press, like the figures of the Tanagra in the Greek marketplace.

And the writer knew whom he was addressing; he was writing for the reader who for ten pennies contracted with him for a moment to discuss together something with the complicity of a sorcerer, to fly into a rage or fall into a reverie about something. The "colorful" piece appeared and the phone was already ringing, the mailman brought letters, and readers – on the street, the trams, in the cafés – acknowledged the daily exchange of views with winks and shouts. In this complicity was something atmospherically stimulating and provocative. There were thirty years in my life when I wrote several of these "colorful" pieces for dailies nearly every day. This was my profession.

I once dreamt I was standing on a platform in a hall packed with people. I was dressed in a frock coat and held a top hat and a magic wand in my hand. I asked the esteemed audience for its kind attention, raised the magic wand, and with a single stroke chopped off my head, put it into the top hat, and then, serenely, with easy movements, I scratched the inside of the top hat with the magic wand, pulled out my head and put it back on my neck. I said: "Voilà!" I bowed and applause exploded. This was the dream. (Literary journalism was like this sleight of hand. Is it possible that "lofty literature" is also this kind of daring feat? It is a desecration to utter it, but sometimes I am tempted by this dream.)

But I thought that if this was the price of staying in the proximity of the Hungarian language (deaf, dumb, but close), I must pay this price as well. I did not lack invitations to speak up. Newspapers and journals – not just the surviving, low-circulation, bourgeois-complexioned print media, but the recent "party-line" newspapers and journals coming out with resounding political party labels – urged me not to be silent but to speak out, to write anything whatsoever as before, just so I wrote. The temptation, the persuasion was vigorous. Writing for the desk drawer was al-

ways a form of paralysis. Even as the actor cannot "play" alone in his room because without an audience he is not "playing" but making faces in the manner of a madman, so the writer cannot write for posterity. He has to have a reaction, immediately, even that very day. (Gide, when he determined that in the future he would be writing posthumous works, quickly discerned that he had absolutely no desire to write.) I sensed something similar, when at this time, as formerly, I sat down to the desk made from four-inch fir beams which was once a goat-footed canteen table in a cloister in Szepes. Write to whom? Writing to a nothing is an exertion, much as if a mute were gasping for breath, turning pale without a voice. (The desk was damaged during the siege; a shell fragment grazed the thick top of the fir-tree construction, and this piece of damaged furniture always directed my attention to the fact that something was wrong with Hungarian literature.) Still, I wrote notes in my diary and outlines of novels for the drawer. I didn't show what I wrote to anyone. I wrote as I had imagined I would that night on the terrace of the Parisian café: like someone who had the means of waiting until the Russian forces were withdrawn from the country, until people spoke, wrote and behaved freely. I dreamt like this because human nature is weak. I came to understand that I was living in a kind of country where not only the freedom of speech and writing are forbidden but also the freedom of silence.

Amid the other urgent items on their agenda, the Communists began to keep watch over those writers who – without compelling cause, voluntarily – remained silent. This ominous attention scrutinized me, too. In the Bolsheviki's timetable, the lot of the "bourgeois" writers was just as dearly prescribed as that of other citizens in countries sentenced to conversion into colonies in their timetable for social, religious and political reorganization. They gave lenient sen-

tences to those writers who, in the recent radical right-wing period, voiced the fallacies in the spheres of thought labeled Fascism; and, forgiving them after they spent a short time in purgatory, they recalled them to participate in a range of activities permitted by Communistic cultural policy. At first, they put the "bourgeois writers," myself included, under quarantine, believing that the threat of starvation would force us into self-criticism. But not much time passed, and they caught on to the fact that they were unable to put anything in the place of the muzzled "bourgeois literature" — nothing that the reader was inclined to pick up on his own and gladly read. The Party's gibbering orthodox literature, the commissioned trash of Party policy, the panting dissertations called socialist realism did not appeal to the reader. In vain did they introduce Russian Communist plays in the theaters that had supposedly enjoyed great success in the Soviet Union; spectators could not be dragged to such productions with a rope, and the theaters remained empty. "The theater is yours, you are performing for yourself," the actor said mockingly, when the Party-minded play presented on official command was staged in an empty theater. Propagandistic literature gathered dust in the basements of hastily "reeducated" publishing houses; they couldn't find readers. Just as the Communists began to lure the professional intelligentsia back to the most important workplaces, so, after a short while, they also lured back the bourgeois writers to start speaking up. They kept inviting me, too. It didn't require a particular perspicacity for me to understand the meaning of the amiable prompting. I should support the system without emphasizing the symbols of Communism heavily. I, the bourgeois, the non-Party writer, should certify by speaking up that Communist power is now permanently established. The criticism of "initial errors" was not banned, it was possible to criticize individuals and institutions; it just wasn't per-

missible to judge with even a single word what everything was the result of – the Soviet system, Communism. In order to produce the illusion of good faith and spontaneity, they had need for toothless, innocuous criticism, too.

This was the time when I realized I would have to leave my country; I had to leave it not just because the Communists would not let me write freely, but mainly and even much more so because they would not let me be silent freely. In this system, if a writer does not repudiate everything into which he was born, in which he grew up, in which he believed – his class, culture, middle-class and humanist outlook, the democratic version of social development – if he does not repudiate all this, the Communists sometimes make a living corpse, sometimes – as they did out of Russian writers who refused to submit – a real corpse out of him. Those in the sphere of violent systems cast the “intellectual worker” – the writer, the scholar, the artist – in an extraordinary role. In the chronicle of every such system comes the moment when the “intellectual worker” confers confirmation on the system with the mere fact of his presence. He withdraws, remains silent in vain; nor does it help if everyone, including the system’s sleuths and summary court judges, knows that in his soul he rejects the experiment of the violent system. The fact of his presence vindicates the violence. This is the moment when it is not enough to be silent – the “no” must be categorically declared with all its consequences, not only with words but with action. This is the moment when the contaminated area must be abandoned. This “no” is a very difficult word; it is accompanied by the kind of sacrifice that no one can demand of another. The “intellectual worker” can demand this sacrifice only of himself. In *Crito* (the little book escaped destruction, and I took it off the shelf and leafed through it) Socrates says that every citizen has the right to leave his country if he does not

want to participate in acts which he does not consider suitable to the interests of his country. Thoreau, the solitary and heretical sage of the North American forests – I don't know whether he ever read *Crito*, because he lived without books on roots and wild honey – said something similar in "Civil Disobedience:" if you are unable to protect yourself against guilt in any other way, then you must leave your country. Everyone has this right who doesn't want to become an accomplice in an evil deed. Babits was not the first (nor the last) to murmur angrily that "the silent ones are accomplices in guilt." At such a time, speaking out loudly is not a right but a duty.

Many, great and small, had already exercised this right – and many did not. Those who remain at home will not through that fact become the accomplices in the outrages committed against humanity. A people can never commence an exodus. Nor, failing that, can it be demanded of human beings that they be heroes for decades – and the "hero" is most often the hero of *fuite en avant*. The writer, his educational situation, is different. But all this is a matter of indifference if the writer who decides to take the wanderer's staff in hand thinks of the ten million or more who stay at home and, no matter what happens, must survive everything happening there. When the writer departs, he is forever accountable to his abandoned people because he is a writer only in the language his people speaks. If he crosses the border, he will become a cripple who always lurches about the continents on artificial crutches – sometimes on extraordinary prostheses but, for all that, always crutches, with the help of devices supporting cripples. An Englishman, a Frenchman, an Italian or a German cannot fathom what it means to be a writer in the world in the language of a companionless, solitary people. I had to take this into account also. And many other matters as well: for example, the fact that liberty exacts a very

high price. The emigrant is not welcomed anywhere; at best, he is tolerated. Anyone who is not willing to pay this great price would be wiser to stay at home. For as soon as he leaves that special situation which, despite all the danger, still signifies protection, which forms the solidarity of "home," leaps from the frying pan into the fire. All this must be taken into account intellectually and instinctively – but a voice outshouted everything, a voice which was now just as unequivocal as the one that had shouted at me in the Parisian night to go home and write and live in the Hungarian language. The voice now said something else. It said I must leave my country because in it one can no longer be silent freely.

This was the moment when I still bartered in my own mind. Leave everything behind? The Hungarian language, Hungarian literature? The strange, impalpable and yet real solidarity of the language community? What would happen (I haggled) if I attempted to stay at home? All is fair in love and war: what would happen if I wore a mask, my best face, and nodding occasionally, bought opportunities for solitude, retirement, and silence? Terrorist systems offer such opportunities. Terror is dangerous because it knows fear. If it senses that people fear it, it is sometimes possible to force through a compromise. Fellow travelers, who had the need for others to compromise themselves, too, reassured me privately and confidentially that exceptions were also found in the Soviet Union, that there they didn't dispose of everyone who wasn't a writer "following the Party line;" writers like Pasternak and a good many others lived in a frontier-like, peripheral tolerance, an indulgent indifference. (Until one day they flew into a rage and vilified Pasternak, too, to death. But at the time fellow travelers did not mention this.) With us everything will be different, so they reassured us, and this reassurance was more nauseating than intimidation. They wanted me to emasculate my-

self voluntarily, and then I could take my place as a singing eunuch in the chorus of castrated writers. What awaited me if I stayed? I would become a tolerated and pathetic figure to whom they would throw the bread of charity. (Or the brioche of charity, which would be worse.) You don't have to join the Party, just practice a bit of self-criticism, acknowledge that you had erred when you were born and turned into what you had become, and promise to re-educate yourself in the future; you merely had to relinquish the criminal obsessions of bourgeois humanism and become one of the correspondent members of the progressive Socialist intelligentsia. No one expects anything more than this from my sort of person.

I could stay under such conditions; then in the Party's Holy of Holies they would decide whether to publish one of my books or to release paper for a new release of one of my old books. I could occasionally go abroad (subject to certain guarantees of returning home); I could participate at government expense in literary meetings, proving with my presence that intellectual freedom exists in Hungary; after all, I, the writer who is not a Communist, could appear and speak at the intellectual gatherings of the free world. In place of temporary lodgings, the Party would assign me a lovely flat in the house of some bourgeois, now dead or driven into exile. In exchange for all this, they would ask nothing more of me than from time to time to kick persons condemned to death, thus not only "counter-revolutionaries," but also such Communists as Rajk, for example, for whom the Communists no longer had any need and so would get rid of. (There were some who did this.) I should urge the Hungarian worker, if he can no longer bear the forced pace of labor in "Socialist work-competition," the starvation wages of Stahnovism, to go to Stalin's bronze statue, look up at the image of the People's Headmaster, and then he will suddenly understand the purpose and meaning of com-

pulsory piece-work. (Someone turned up to write this.) Or I should agree when they are preparing to evict intellectuals with their families from their homes and drive them to barns in the provinces and confirm that from an "ideological viewpoint" this is the proper course of action. (This was published.) Or I should be the thirty-fourth to say something in the presentation volume in which thirty-three Hungarian writers and poets celebrate the sixtieth birthday of Mátyás Rákosi. (The book appeared four years later, in 1952.) These anti-Welsh bards who recommended the album to the "beloved leader of our people" with transports of delight in verse and prose had by then already observed the leader's activity in daily proximity for the seventh year. When the book appeared, the Communists had already executed Rajk, they were already herding the peasants into collective farms with pizzles after "land distribution," and eyewitnesses slowly straggled back who reported what had happened to Béla Kun and his comrades and then to the millions who vanished before the Second World War in the pits of the Stalin purges, even as after the Second World War they became lost in the forced labor camps and mass graves of newer purges. When the book was published the free press was gone, and so was free book publishing and free theater. The stubby shadow of the leader beloved by the people had darkened everything. And the very same poets and writers who sporadically hurried to fondle Rákosi with nearly sexual elation, four years later, in 1956 – "out of that common sense so characteristic of Hungarians" – reviled with chest-pounding rattles the tyrant they had celebrated in orgasmic ecstasy four years earlier. Choking with sobs, they vowed that they "will never again be willing to lie," and, with literary prizes in their pockets, they cursed in somberly showy verses the tyranny in whose implementation, on the strength of the evidence in the presentation album they saw, just a short while ago, a

hero, a personality, or precisely a "father." They wrote all this when the Russians, too, had already made up their minds to bundle the nation's overly-zealous leader out of the country. And the people themselves were getting ready to go to the brink of suicide in protest against Rákosi and his regime.

In the summer of 1948, it was not possible to foresee this with factual exactness. But everything and much else exuded an odor: a suffocating, acrid odor, which resembled the smoke of a manure pile when spontaneous combustion occurs, could be smelled everywhere. Shall I enlist as a runner in that literary contest where the "engineers of the soul" trotted with sweaty metrical feet and ran the festive relay with panting ardor? Violent regimes have always existed, and poets and scribblers have turned up to celebrate the tyrant slavishly. But there is no instance in the history of violent regimes – indeed, there isn't one example in Hitler's Reich and in the frightening life in the Soviet Union following the Stalin "purges" – of a writer generation celebrating a tyrant with a choral song choking with so much rapture. Sit this out? Shall I be silent with stifled breath when those dare to preach about "freedom" who live and play the bully to deprive a society of its right to freedom? Is it worth paying this price to stay at home?

What kind of "home" will this be that I am buying at this price? Is there anything – a "country," a "people," a "nation" – that is worth my surrendering the demand of freedom? And what is freedom? Babits exclaimed passionately: "Freedom! they say and the earth sprouts gallows-trees." Montesquieu (I ask for the book, there on the top shelf, third from the right) said that "freedom is the most profound element in human history: it is the enduring desire, the battle and aspiration against despotism, the obstinate marching in history toward freedom." Freedom is simply

this: the permanent yearning to be free. Is this true? Does mankind really desire freedom?

During this debate, memories of my trip to the West returned. Where in Europe today do people want to possess freedom in all its consequences? If people truly desire freedom, why do they put up so willingly with every kind of servitude? "Individuals, like peoples, are happy only if, in keeping with their natures, they can live in freedom," so teaches Monsieur Montesquieu; "despotism desires the 'good' in vain; the people do not want this good if they do not choose it of their own free will." Would he write down this lofty philosophy today? Like Plato and Socrates, Aristotle (I ask for the book, there next to the *Crito*) believed that "not every human being is born free by nature." These philosophers believed that there are types born free, nature endowing them with the demand for freedom, and then there are others in whom the chromosomes, the genes are of a different nature. And this type does not really want freedom; this sort is not willing to pay the high price that has to be paid always and everywhere for freedom. How could I know what "freedom" means to several hundred million Chinese? Or to the Hindus? Or to the Slavs? (The book can be put back on the shelf.) But right next to it is the other, the explanatory handbook that the Communists published, the textbook that explains the kind of freedom Communism promises: it states the thesis in simple, unambiguous words, as if a traveling salesman were explaining the workings of a vacuum cleaner. Thus: "Communism is that social order replacing Capitalism in which the basis of production conditions is the social ownership of the means of production." This sounds fine and simple. Reality, in practice, is more complex, but the textbook is not obligated to know this. Let's turn some pages: "In Communist society the hostility of class divisions ends between the city and the village as well as between intellectual and physical work" (is this cer-

tain?) "and the development of production power attains a level at which everyone can work according to his capability and receive according to his needs from the produced benefits." (This must be reality; after all, it is here, in print.) True, there were always contrary opinions. At the end of his long life, in his eightieth year, Chateaubriand (the book is not at hand; a beautiful copy of *Memoirs From Beyond the Tomb* stayed in the rubbish pile, but I remember certain statements he made) still summarized everything he experienced and observed up close, hence the collapse of the world of the Bourbons, the French Revolution, Napoleon, the restoration, the downfall of the new Bourbons: "Without private ownership there is no freedom." I committed this to memory. It was disturbing: If I remain, I may one day no longer remember this sentence.

Herein lay the rub, not in the "dangers." It was not the excruciatingly laughable role that the Communists would give me, the "bourgeois writer," with friendly winks. Nor was it that they would force me to accept degrading honors, that clenching my teeth, I would have to put literary awards in my pocket and endure the pinning of Red Star decorations on my chest. They would force me to accept these from persons who sponge on the property of the Hungarian people, on the public weal without the mandate and authority of the Hungarian people... But what could I possibly do if I did not accept this role? Should I begin an intellectual hunger strike? They would force-feed me. Writing is an organic undertaking; otherwise, it is meaningless and immoral. Or should I take refuge in dead genres, be silent in hexameters? The real danger lay elsewhere. It was more dangerous than anything else for me to stay here and then not remember the other "I" who not so long ago still had the strength and desire to protest. The moment would come when I would not be able — inside myself, not even mutely — to cry out against something I knew to be hostile to human

beings, contrary to the interests of the people, and inhuman. Then I would die more miserably than the victims in the camps, who at least to the last moment hated those who tortured and killed them.

If I stay... For me, too, will begin the mysterious technique of brainwashing which is more dangerous than the eradication of consciousness executed with chemical and physical instruments in prisons and torture chambers. They will force me to eradicate voluntarily the protesting "I" within myself. Because this is what they want. Their methods – the finely tuned versions of coddling and threatening, of slighting and enticing – are efficacious: anyone they take aim at in this manner can, one day, no longer perceive reality or his own lot. The moment arrives when he is not only apathetic, deathly weary, and hopelessly skeptical – the moment arrives when he believes that all is exactly as it ought to be. Freedom is not a realized, stable condition; it is, rather, a continual striving toward something, and brainwashing eradicates this striving in the consciousness because the person they "handle" in this manner wakes up one day not wanting to be free. Then he explains to himself that he renounces his personal freedom in the "people's" interest and accepts the comfortable partiality of belonging to the New Class in the "nation's" interest. (There are thieves who unexpectedly receive clemency after a long imprisonment, but commit suicide at the moment of their release because they don't dare to leave the accustomed security of the prison.) A moment also comes in this internment when the personality has already become not only a trained, conditioned prisoner in a violent regime, but also a willing ally and accomplice, because the last spark of consciousness of the necessity for liberation has died out in him. This is the moment when something suddenly darkens and brightens up: the "grain of madness," hence destruction, or the moment of the "great separation." (Roger Martin du Gard

– more airily, more in the French manner than Goethe's – said thus: "It is not permitted to hate, but it is permitted to divorce.") To me this was the moment when I realized I had to leave Hungary – unconditionally, without bargaining, without any hope of returning, leave while I still had the strength to protest from within. I had to pay the price for denying them the opportunity to corrupt me, my personality.

In these times, sometimes a pair of lines from one of Karinthy's poems crossed my mind – recurring like the snatch of a melody (like *mouches volantes* on the retina) clinging to consciousness. The lines went like this: "I'd rather be eaten by vermin, than eat vermin." Years later, I recollected these lines on foreign continents.

16

In life there is (rarely) a situation (it can't be measured in time, sometimes it takes only moments) that Saint John the Cross calls "The Dark Night of the Soul." I don't understand mystics; every mystic is alien to my mental frame. I can sense the "wondrous" only in hefty earthly reality; I can view the "supernatural" only as a by-product of Nature. There is such a "dark night" in life, however. One cannot express it in words; indeed, subsequently one cannot even sense its significance. The forces that had till then preserved balance in life – consciousness, experience, the disciplinary power of the "I" – lose their impact, and so the compulsory agreement between intellect and instinct is upset. This is what the Dark Night is like. All I know is that I lived through something like this; I don't remember the circumstances, nor can I describe what it was like. Just like the mystics – Saint John of the Cross, Pascal, Swedenborg – who cannot relate what "happens" on that particular night. Only the consciousness of its con-

sequences remains: that the individual's relationship with himself and the world has altered. It is then that the farewell ensues.

It was not to the Fishermen's Bastion that I had to bid farewell. Not even the dawn on Lake Balaton. Not Jancsi and Juliska of Hungarian folk tale. I had to say goodbye to that "I" who was not a caricature; it was, rather, the real "I" behind the distorted portrayal, and only here in my native land was it the kind of "I" that I recognized. (Valéry, in one of his finger exercises, waxed enthusiastic about the human body: he said that we have three different kinds of bodies: the one which others see and know, another that we see and know, and the third, the invisible one that, behind the outwardly perceptible and tangible body, is composed of cells, ligaments, and millions and millions of indescribably complicated components as an inner, visceral body which we do not know, the surgeon being the only one who sees something of this third body during the identification of a corpse or an operation.) Somehow it is like this with the "I," too: there are several kinds of "I" independent of the personality about which we know nothing certain, we only suspect that it speaks up and enunciates the decision in fateful moments. If we think of our bodies, the "I" does not identify with it; after all, this is how we speak of it: "the body I have." There is a separate "I" and this "I" has – to a certain extent – a body. But no one says "my I" – because the "I" does not belong to anyone, not even to the consciousness. In a case like this the neuro-pathologist would think of schizophrenia, but I'd rather call it the consciousness of the conscious. In this kind of moment, the "I" detaches itself, it becomes independent of the "body" and the "soul." This is the sort of thing that appears vaguely in the Dark Night.

At a time like this, one must say farewell to the "I" bound to the native land. (Lola promised she would come with me, and this pleased me, because one can

have confidence in the promise. A man falls in love with a woman twice: first when he comes to know her, and a second time twenty-five years later in the period following the silver wedding anniversary. What takes place in-between is most often confusion and without any significance from an emotional point of view.) I didn't say goodbye to individuals, because I had already learned that when something of great importance happens in our lives, they cannot be made to understand it. They don't believe that a vital decision has no other significance than the compulsion of the conscience; they suspect that a wait-and-see policy, a plan peering into the distance, is the reason for the act. It is not possible to persuade any man living of the fact that someone has rejected disinterestedly and undesignedly something from which possibly he, too, could derive some profit. That's why it is wiser to be silent at such times. I didn't say farewell to regions and places either, because the only "region" that (then and later, too) tempted me abroad and in my dreams was far away, beyond Hungary's borders: these regions were the cities, forests, and glades of Upper Hungary, the Tatra mountain chain. And I never went back to this region, where foreigners were once again dwelling.

It took a year for the day of departure to follow the Dark Night (or whatever it was). During this year I was constantly saying goodbye without this leave-taking being a plan, desire, or conscious act. In the morning I would go into town, where I had no particular business and absentmindedly walk the streets where there was nothing surprising, except that at a bend, a street corner, a gate, I would think, abstractly and incidentally but distinctly: "I shall never see this street again." And I would walk on. A man would come toward me whom I hadn't seen for a long time, with whom now when I was about to depart, I would shake hands and think: "Funny, I am seeing this man for the

last time, I am never going to shake his hand again." And when I thought this, I wouldn't feel any kind of sentimental regret. The details became blurred because I was saying farewell to all.

Simultaneously there was in this continual, silent, unspoken leave-taking a persistent admonition: I didn't want to leave my native land without taking something with me for the long journey. Something that I would never again find elsewhere (where?... on the other side). Sentimental, inconsolable persons, when they emigrate, take sepulchral mounds with them, a lump of native earth wrapped in a white handkerchief. Others take a photograph or keepsake, a lock of hair, a restaurant menu. And then, many years later, they blanch in a foreign land because they chance upon a lock of hair of someone who died long ago, or they keep swallowing eagerly because they read such words on the old menu as "Esterházy cutlet" or "sponge cake with curds flavored with vanilla and raisins." And all this represents the homeland to them. But I didn't feel any need for such a tangible keepsake. I only knew that quickly, before my train departed, I had to find and then take with me something that later I would not run into abroad again. But this wasn't a simple task, because I didn't know what that "something" was that I wanted to take with me. I only knew that it was missing; it was missing now, even before the train set out.

In times preceding drought disasters, people for whom drought is synonymous with fate protect themselves with extraordinary measures. The drought is, in Nature's household, an enigmatic, inexplicable catastrophe. No one knows what causes it and why it occurs precisely where it does and not somewhere else. People attribute it to the cycle of sunspots, but this is mere conjecture. One day an idiotic and merciless power parches areas as large as a country. This doesn't happen overnight. First birds begin to migrate,

then other animals, and finally humans flee the drought. Those who don't escape, because dire fate – lineage, vocation – binds them, become restless and attentive. Water levels in wells fall, puddles dry up, river banks look as if they had been planed smooth, watering places waste away. Vegetation protects itself: it has been noted that in the period before drought cycles certain trees and plant species grow long roots searching the depths for moisture remaining in the soil. When the drought reduces plants and animals to ashes – in Brazil, Africa – the shepherd and the herdsman lie flat on their stomachs on the ground burned bone-hard to smell the water, sniff the moistness seeping into the deeper layers of the soil and sticking there a bit longer. If the water has a smell, men and animals gouge the parched earth in search of the water.

I did something like this instinctively during my last year in Budapest. In truth, I did nothing else but read. During this time, I didn't open books by foreign writers. I read the works of Hungarian writers. But not the known, honored and beloved classics – the works of Arany, Vörösmarty, and Jókai – not even the great generation of our own century, the writings of Móricz, Kosztolányi, Krúdy, and Babits, but those of the less noted, in part already forgotten poets and authors who became lost in the literary competition, lagging behind the commercialized, fashionable, and spotlighted names. It began when, during a stroll and browsing, I found a little book by Gyula Szini on one of the bookshelves in a secondhand bookstore on the Boulevard displaying booklets published with great technical care by two Hungarian printers in the provinces who devoted heroic attention to details of their task, Kner in Gyoma and Tevan in Békéscsaba. *The Clowns*, this was its title. I bought it for a few fillérs, took it home, and began reading it, as if it were some oddity. And I kept sampling this pure, powerful prose like someone who has stumbled on a buried cellar

where he discovers a barrel filled with an old vintage and noble beverage. I had known Szini; he was a slight, professorial-mannered, bespectacled man; he parted his hair in the middle; he almost always sat alone in the Balaton Café on Rákóczi Road; his briefcase, bulging with French and literary newspapers and journals, lay on the marble-top table. Newspapers published his writings, but only if there didn't happen to be some more urgent, more marketable manuscript available. He was a splendid writer: shy, quiet, and, at the same time, strong and plucky. He spoke in his every line about vital matters, about the humane, the poetic, the childlike, the enchanting, the magical. This little book of his reminded me of the eerie vision of the young Joyce's classical stories, *The Dubliners*: he recounted memories, and the fire and power of vision ennobled those memories in the short writings.

This is how it began. Suddenly, like fauna and flora during the drought, the moisture clinging to the deep layers of the earth, I began to search the works of the "second set" of Hungarian writers for what I wanted to take with me, because I knew I would never again find any trace of them abroad.

It wasn't easy for me to get my hands on these books at home either; occasionally a book of poems, a collection of stories turned up on the dust-covered shelves of secondhand bookstores – faded, yellow printings, most of them already having been discarded by libraries. And only very few were living who still remembered Gyula Szini's name which once, thirty years before, had brought luster to columns of the feuilleton; at the time, however, the sophisticated reader knew that he was receiving a masterfully fused gift. This "second set," these very capable but little-known Hungarian writers and poets who got lost in the pandemonium of the literary hubbub would not allow themselves to create something inferior. In their time there was still a "literature" evaluated by the strict standard of the cen-

turies-old Western meaning of the word. The writer was still not afraid to run into a conflict with the masses in order to preserve the uniqueness of his individuality against the consumer standards of mass taste (as he fears today that he will perish if he gives up the uniqueness of his individuality and yields to the mass market). These writers still wrote for the few. Like heretics, they addressed the sect with secret words. The works of the "great writers," of the famous, celebrated figures quickly fill up with banalities because the "success," then time, life, the monotony of repetition make what was once astonishing in their work particularly colorless. This happens to many good writers. But the writer whom only a sect reads will not become bland with the passage of time. Szini did not enjoy any "success" whatsoever — the man, his works were invisible, he remained on dusty shelves but he stayed lively. He did not frequent "society" — not he nor his companions, the Hungarian writers wandering in the miserable solitude, the monastic dreariness as if they had accepted La Bruyère's counsel, who warned writers about the social life because — this is how he put it — "the wise man is wary about visiting society frequently: he fears he will be bored there."

A generation existed: Szini, the "French-in-spirit," bespectacled narrator of few words; Tömörkény, who painted the lonely lot of the people on the banks of the Tisza river with Chekhovian watercolors and evoked Asiatic remembrances and destinies in each of his sketches; Lovik, the "equestrian" who seemed to write elegant, foppish and deeply melancholy tales in a pair of britches with a riding-whip in his hand; in regions recalling the rusty autumn hues of the great artist of the Barbizon School of painting, László Paál, cantered the hero of the Lovik tale, the "solitary horseman" who heeded the distant sound of the horn and the death screeches of spent emotions in the solitude of the forest and literature. And these ro-

mantic Lovik figures were not grotesque; they had a genuine impact, an attitude toward life. The melancholy of people from another time smoldered in the lines of Lovik's stories. Cholnoky, that inebriated Don Quixote whose writings portrayed destinies and landscapes recalling the visions of the paranoid, the inspired Csontváry; and Géza Csáth in whose head "the golden lightning of morphine" flashed – Kosztolányi, already deathly ill on his hospital bed, wrote this line, which also befit his nephew, the short-story writer escaping into morphine and self-destruction. Like one who becomes the victim of a strange passion and searches fervidly for enhancements, I began leafing through old periodicals and was gratified to discover a Tamás Moly story in which a "successful writer" with a bad conscience looks up a forgotten colleague who was more faithful to the deeper meaning of writing; a Sándor Térey verse in which the poet recounts his recollection of a rendezvous of fifty years before and confesses this about his companion: "the slight down-at-the heels girls of Pest/ How they bloom after a kiss/ In their eyes, though young/ Burns that baleful, half-mad, wild gleam/ With which they call one to kill and to embrace," and he ends it with this Boucher-like stroke of the brush: "To keep her new, silken dress from slipping down/ She put her legs on the bed." When Térey wrote this poem, the girls were not yet wearing miniskirts. I went to the library in the National Museum and searched the fiction columns of old, bound newspapers for the works of dead or half-dead contemporaries. The Hungarian short story for the *feuilleton* section, in which the writers, ignored and scraping along without publishers, audience and theaters, distilled the "great theme," because they didn't have time to do a novel or a play – what a great genre it was! What must have been burned up in the alchemists' workrooms of this quiet generation, while out of the large

amount of raw material so prodigally burned up, occasionally a drop of gold ran out!

For this was also the "other Hungary," the creative, shyly emaciating Hungary living quietly behind the bulging façade. I read the works of forgotten Hungarian writers for a year. The surrounding world did not give these writers the oxygen without which an intellectual life cannot exist: the summons, that language of gesture which also gives strength to unsuccessful writers in the general language areas. Most of them got lost in publicism or taverns. When this generation was writing, literary criticism was still found in Hungarian newspapers; writers paid attention to the opinions of Ambrus, Péterfy, Riedl or Schöpflin because these critics did not want to slaughter but to nurture and help them; they cleared the trash and rampant weeds out of Hungarian literature the way the farmer scrapes off with a prod the mud stuck to the life-planting plow at the end of the furrow. The "publicist" was still a "belletrist" – and he was a "publicist" principally because the call was not strong enough for him to be anything other than a belletrist. There were many of them. László Lakatos, the sadly elegant journalist of the streets of Pest, wrote muted stories, literary essays shyly, so to say, with apologetic humility. In time the lead dust of standing type covered his name and modest, huskily passionate works. Like the maned prophets in the desert, poets howled their words of reproof into the hubbub of the literary world from the gallery of the New York Café. Among them were those who were only good for a verse apiece, like Menyhért Szász who scribbled blearily, shortsightedly in the cigar smoke of the Fiume Café on Museum Boulevard, writing hopeless love poems in a deep male voice; like Artúr Keleti who disguised himself as a medieval hooded monk in his poems and, so attired, chanted the grief he felt at the imperfections of the human and divine order to the world; like István

Szegedi who, using the simplest means and watercolors, wrote "pure poesy," words tied into a bouquet of wild flowers, and not a trace of him remains. Zoltán Somlyó was more fortunate: the "accursed poet" in a wine-red vest with metal buttons, his pitch-black forelock disheveled by ten fingernails, composed poems of such high temperature about women, love, misery, and loneliness that they rivaled the choice lyrics of his great contemporaries, but the man and his works always trudged along on the edge of the asphalt sidewalk, never getting farther than the number of echoes his café competitors granted him. For a year I tracked the traces of this generation with the passion of a collector but also like one who is preparing for an expedition and would like to take something with him that he won't find at all in the distance, in the perilous remoteness. A trace of this generation existed only here, in some shop of an antiquarian bookseller's on the Boulevard, and in the dusty halls of public libraries in Pest.

These forgotten, unsuccessful, extraordinary writers gave me rich provisions for the journey in solitude, for the heretical life in a cave. Through their works I saw more truly what I would lose if I left — more truly than in the masterworks of the great contemporaries which the wanderer ultimately finds abroad also. The true greatness of Hungarian literature loomed dimly in the background, in the perspective of the faint, faded "second set": the demand under which these writers wrote in an undemanding age was heroic. I spent a year collecting marks of this demand for exactness. It was this that I wanted to take with me in the form of recollections from my readings. I had to hurry because the Party was also in a hurry. The Communists did everything to condition the general knowledge of literature, purge from the memory everything that called to mind the recent demand for exactness, this "middle-class legacy." They

did not want to hear what the writer thought, only what the Party thought. They didn't know, or didn't want to know, that the artist – the writer, too, if he is an artist – can never be anything other than an aristocrat; and this aristocrat is never "asocial," because he has a role which he shoulders and fulfills. The writer who was silent – mute but "resisting" – quickly sensed that the Communists were treating him as the Inquisition had the heretics. They decided at this time to demolish the "untimely monuments:" they rushed to raze everything that reminded Hungarians of the achievements of their bourgeois past. To the Communists, the Hungarian literature springing from the earth of the bourgeois intellectual was also such an "untimely monument."

It was not only we, the Hungarian writers and readers who lived in this climate, who felt this strange atmosphere of intellectual bleakness, this listlessness, gasping asthmatically, but foreigners as well. Naturally, not those Western tourists whom the Communists invited from time to time, so that, in return for the warm hospitality and beribboned gifts, they could admire and go into raptures over in the world over the achievements of the "people's democracy," but the objective and clear-eyed foreigners.

At this time, one of the representatives of a great Western power looked me up. He had arrived recently; he had the official assignment of observing the symptoms of Hungarian intellectual life. We quickly understood each other; we got our bearings with phrases. He spoke five languages. When I handed him Babits's translation of *The Divine Comedy*, he recited several tercets in good Italian, and he asked me to read from the Hungarian text. He said that such a translation could be attained only in a great literary culture but that he had to admit that everything related to literature which he was now experiencing in Hungary was completely barren and shallow. I reas-

sured him that Hungarian intellectual life was now truly bleak, but I asked him to look around in our libraries, where he would find the Hungarian translations of the important works of world literature. I saw he was skeptical, and so I began to prove it to him. I took him over to my bookshelves where the volumes I had pulled out of the rubble of my demolished house were arranged and showed him a Hungarian Goethe series that had taken a shot in the back of its neck during the siege: a Shakespeare edition whose insides hung out a bit but was, in this historically worn condition, still Shakespeare; a copy of Castiglione's *The Courtier*, who, though flayed, produced an impact grandly – and I handed him these worn objects of piety one by one. I showed him the complete Dante – one of our poets, I explained, translated it for ten years, the very same poet who, though dying of throat cancer, was still revising his translation of Sophocles – Babits. I handed him the Hungarian Aristophanes translations, János Arany's masterly translations, the Euripides translations, the *Odyssey*, which several translated. I noted for him that Arany and his generation began to translate the complete Shakespeare one hundred years ago, and it is still being translated; every generation of poets added their own artistic attention and dusted off this wonder of the world. "A complete Shakespeare?" my guest asked in a dubious voice. The complete, I showed him, even the Sonnets.

Then I asked him not to inspect these damaged remnants but to go with me to the University Library or the Academy's where I can show him, in undamaged condition, the several hundred volumes that preserve in Hungarian translation the most significant works of ancient and modern classicists for the Hungarian reader. I told him that Hungarian writers and poets had completed this enormous task in just under two hundred years. He could find most of the significant works of Russian, English, French and Ger-

man, Italian and Spanish literature in the Hungarian language in our libraries. The worthiness of the translations varies, of course, but the whole together really presents a picture of world literature in the isolated language of a little nation. My guest reflected, yielded to my invitation, and the next day I was able to prove the truth to him in the libraries. My foreign visitor put on his glasses, looked through the card catalogue, handled and leafed through the books he wanted to examine, and finally said quietly that he had not known about all this and was now looking at Hungarian intellectual life with entirely different eyes. I thanked him for his kindness and went back to my room in Buda, picked up Gyula Török's novel, *The Ring with the Green Stone*, and continued saying farewell to Hungary.

This was the kind of leave-taking that occurred when I went up to the floor at the Academy where, in his office, Géza, the General Secretary – like the commander of a castle with a watchtower and drawbridge after a lost battle – was guarding, arranging and tending what remained of Hungarian literature with worried solicitude. Warily – as if the enemy had to be kept from seeing the secreted treasures and plundering a Vajda poem or a Vörösmarty simile – he took János Arany's surviving manuscripts out of a drawer and showed them to me. The atmosphere in the General Secretary's office felt as if a fierce hurricane had howled across the world and left no impact here. A part of the Arany papers had been destroyed during the siege, but in this room, where Arany himself had served as General Secretary, the atmosphere of a great intellectual endeavor was truly palpable. Géza showed me the manuscript of *Toldi's Love*. This manuscript was written in pencil and contained many revisions, but the poet, after making the revisions, most often restored the first wording in the final text. Arany wrote a thick copybook of historical, documentary

notes to *Toldi's Love*, short studies on apparel and legal customs. Géza asserted that most often only a single epithet from the notes found their way into the manuscript of the epic poem. Toward the end of his life, János Arany, his eyes enfeebled, was unable to read, and his wife and son read to him. But he could always write, groping in the dark. He committed every word of *Toldi's Love* to paper. We spelled out the words in the manuscript: the words with meticulously engraved and disciplined letters looked back at us from a span of more than half a century. I think this was the hour when I bade farewell to Hungarian literature.

17

*"... The cold Star burns; awaken, homeless one
Another country calls, Prospect is its name
With bare head and in a light coat
The west wind roams to adventure with you
Lava already covers your bathroom,
But the ocean calls, plunge in, naked:
Emerge from the familiar into the boundless
Arise from dead patterns alive..."*

18

The Communists who returned from Moscow and were trained there constructed "nationalization" perfectly. Just as three years earlier, in 1945, "land distribution" had severed the driving nervous system of the aristocracy and gentry class, so "nationalization," in 1948 severed the tendons and muscles of the entrepreneurial echelons of the Hungarian citizenry. With the nationalization of industrial enterprises, the Communists, with a single stroke, extinguished in the country that neon-bright dawning which till then dis-

tinguished Hungarian cities from the flickering lack of light in its neighboring countries. This "lights out" occurred overnight; no one had any prior knowledge of it; the owners of the companies did not have any more presentiment of what was going to happen than did the new "company directors": mostly untrained workers without up-to-date managerial knowledge who were hastily appointed, who did not suspect that on the next day they would be directors of companies where only the day before they had been employees, or workers.

In the morning, the old owners could not enter the factories that, not infrequently, two or three generations of a family had built up. Or if they had their flat in the factory, they had to leave the building and could not take anything more than the clothes on their backs with them. This happened to the owner and chief editor of the printing firm and liberal newspaper who was driven in the morning from the building where his father and grandfather had created a large, well planned and operated institution that provided a livelihood and occupation for several hundred printers, white-collar workers and journalists. The owner and editor, a quiet, disciplined, somewhat taciturn man, complied wordlessly with the expulsion order. The "new company director" accompanied him to the gate, where he ordered the porter to frisk his manager to see whether he was taking with him any valuables concealed in his pockets – money, bonds, in short something he still owned the day before – whether he had taken something from his own property. The porter, an old peasant from the Alföld with his mustache waxed into sharp points, who had served at the company since he was little more than a child, complied with shaking hands. He searched the owner's pockets, but during the act his hands grew lame and he began to cry. Since this was conduct against the people, the factory director rebuked the porter severely and then

completed the search himself. The owner stood motionless in the gateway, waited for permission to leave, and then without a word stepped out into the street and left the building where his family had built an important firm with a hundred years of work. Such public interludes were common occurrences.

Of course, all this was simply one of the stages in the timetable: after the "nationalization" of industrial enterprises came the confiscation of the wholesale businesses and the free intellectual professions, then later still, the enterprises of the "kulaks" and small shopkeepers. The tempo was swift. My publisher was also "nationalized:" a Communist deputy took over the firm. On a day after its nationalization, I went to the publisher for a farewell visit. The building stood on one of the quiet streets in Lipótváros, where – here also with a hundred years of work – the capable progeny of a family in Pest had built up an enterprise significant in scale not only according to Hungarian but also to different, international standards. A lexicon was prepared in this house; it was a modern press, bookbindery, lithographer. Here were printed the works of József Eötvös, Mór Jókai, and Kálmán Mikszáth, as well as the works of many more recent writers. First I went to the storeroom, where its head showed me the stock of my books with self-conscious eagerness. (My last novel, the second volume of a cycle planned as a trilogy – had recently appeared, and on that very day, one of the vigorous critics of the Communist press organ, the daily called *Szabad Nép*, had characterized my entire lifework as "noxious literature." This determination could not be taken lightly at the time.) The first volume of the novel was already sold out, but the Central Planning Office (or whatever its name was) refused to allot paper for a new edition. Likewise, the firm had not received permission to reprint certain of my old books that were also sold out. Several thousand copies of my books lined the store-

room's shelves, books I had written in the past two decades. This "remainder" – more than thirty titles – comprised what is somewhat grandiloquently called a "lifework." (The rest – perhaps running to a hundred books – consisted of articles, sketches, and stories I had written on contract for newspapers and periodicals in thirty years.)

I looked at the "stock". I had never before seen my books together in such a stack, and face-to-face with them, I felt an uneasiness, uncertainty and repugnance. Here, at the "scene of the deed," the question arose: really, what was the meaning of all this effort? Man is a talking animal. The being evolving out of this animal will be human only in his proportion to his ability to express ideas. But what does an individual want to say when he maniacally expresses his thoughts in writing? When he wants to tell stories? Or to teach? Or just to entertain? Or to persuade and perturb? He wants all this, but perhaps he would like to say something else as well. I could not formulate what I had wanted to say with all these many books. That certain "it is here on the tip of my tongue" loomed in my consciousness. It was certain I wanted to say something "else" when I wrote – not just to tell a story, to convey an observation. (And I would have liked to learn something "else" when I read books – but what?) Now facing the "stock," I felt I had written too much – less would have been more. Now when it seemed probable that my "lifework" would perish, the painful question posed itself. It would have been wiser not to have written many things. Perhaps I would have been wiser not to have written many things. Perhaps I had to write many things, but it would have been more prudent of me not to publish them and, instead, to leave them to dry up in my desk drawer. Just as in life we see and know in critical moments that there were many things we should not have done, better not to have uttered at all. But then the moment of remorse

passes, and there remains – with all its fortuities and failings, along with its guilt – the “whole” which is what it is because it cannot be anything else. And, in the end, we are responsible only for the “whole;” the details don’t count. All these books that I had written with a facile hand, often without thought, sometimes out of pure sport, haphazardly, were what they were because they couldn’t be something else. And now the whole was destroyed.

The head of the storeroom accompanied me to the exit, and squeezed my hand the way a distant relative bids farewell to the head of the mourning family at a funeral. As I was going up the stairs leading to the next floor, I caught sight of a big sign that had been posted in the stairwell during the night: “The factory is yours, you are toiling for yourself!” blared the timely propaganda. Typesetters and lithographers hurried up and down the stairs, the members of the national “all-star team” selected from the high intellectual and ethical level of the Hungarian working class, the workers at the publishing houses. Everyone of them greeted me cordially, indeed with the salutation of solidarity. Not one of them acted like someone who was now “working for himself because he owns the factory.” They knew this was all fraud and coercion.

I shook hands with the literary editor in the director’s office. Saying farewell didn’t require many words; we both knew what had taken place and what could be expected: the work of a hundred years had come to naught overnight. In this beautiful old building nothing more would remain of this effort than the walls and – symbolically – the copyrights. If I stay here, my books will be dumped, sold at a loss. If I leave the country, the entire “inventory” of my books will be sent to a paper mill and ground into pulp. Actually, something else happened; I left the country but they didn’t send my books – several thousand copies of novels, stories, dramas, and colorful sketches – to the

paper mill, but first, at the advice of a Communist financial genius, they carried my "lifework" – as they did the books of other "noxious" writers – into the basement, then sold them later for hard currency in Hungarian bookstores in the Western world, and, of course, also "nationalized" the respectable sums thus received. Later, when I reflected on this, it gave me satisfaction that at least in this indirect way I had the opportunity – if modestly – to do my bit to popularize Hungarian literature abroad, because this hard-currency income also helped the Communists to translate the works of writers faithful to the line and principle into foreign languages, to pay for the translations with hard currency, to finance the foreign editions in part or whole, and perhaps even leaving a few dollars or marks to defray the expenses of certain Hungarian authors' propagandistic trips abroad. This was paltry compensation for me, but then I thought there were writers who paid not with their so-called "lifework" but with their lives for wanting to write freely. At such a time I grew ashamed of myself because I had paid the cheaper price.

I left the publishing house where my books waited in the storeroom to wind up in the secondhand market. It was, I remember, a sunny morning. I walked the length of the downtown street and took a stroll on the arrow-straight avenue leading to the City Park. Pest had already applied the renovative makeup to the façades of houses that had been furrowed by worries and the siege – like the women of Pest who no longer made up their faces like *stary babas* (as they had defended themselves in the dangerous period after the siege) but hurried along the streets, smiling and smartly dressed. I walked absentmindedly, racking my brains about what this mania was. What was the meaning of a "thriving writing career?" What was it that I wanted to say with all those books and the other forms of writing? But everything that came into my

mind was a factitious, tortuous line of argument. Then past the Körönd, suddenly – like the cardplayer who has lost and unexpectedly finds a gold coin in his vest pocket – this entered my mind: “Man – is a possibility.” At first glance this sounded pompous, as when Herr Professor lectures on something commonplace with a raised forefinger. But it also seemed as if someone or something had drawn forth this determination from that mysterious computer that comprises the sum total of the brain cells. I had been writing for decades about things of every description – about the amusing and the horrible – but meanwhile, I always struggled to say somehow that man – this very young mammal who, during the course of organic evolution, perhaps as a consequence of some accidental mutational variation from the blow of a cosmic ray – received the stimulus to diverge from the cerebrum of other organic living creatures and increase the dimension of the cerebrum – that man is something more, something different from what or whom his actual behavior indicates. I wanted to write that there is an element in man which not even the horrors and contingencies evolving from his own nature can modify: he is not “better” than he is but always, beyond every horror, he is something “else” – a possibility. Existentialists believe that man is not what he was born, but what he will become. It was only dim and unformulated, yet I did believe that man is not what he was born, not even what he will become, but always and above all a continuous possibility. I can’t say I thought this way word-for-word on that morning when I left my publisher, when my “lifework” had just begun to rot, and I was walking along a sun-drenched street in Pest. But I remember that abstractly, smoldering, I muttered something like this to myself.

I shall try to describe what happened. I was walking somewhere in the vicinity of the Körönd. In front of the house at 60 Andrassy Road, I looked up at

the windows of the floors on which iron grates had been installed by the secret police to prevent the accused from leaping out during interrogation. The house had a severe look about it, as if it had just been repainted. Behind the barred, closed windows conscientious officials were conducting, in successive shifts, clearly serious, technical work. I remember I also thought that man is a "possibility" in this way, too. I moved on, and then this happened: I stopped at a street corner and suddenly, like someone fainting, I didn't know any longer in which direction to go. I could go straight ahead, out to the City Park. Or I could change direction and head for the Danube via the Oktogon, so that I could go from there to Buda on one of the new bridges. There was no obstacle to any of this. It simply had no *meaning* because I no longer knew which way to go; after all, every route took me to the same place: to an expanse where no freedom existed. A space where the very same tripping device lay in wait at every street corner: brute force and deception. I could enter a shop, but they were not "conducting business" there; instead, reluctant employees were, on orders, engaged in an official deception. An acquaintance passing by on the street might speak to me, but while we exchanged words, I would suspect that he wasn't saying what he wanted to but reeling off something warily and then looking around because, for all we knew, what he was saying confidentially could be overheard. I could go right or left in a city whose inner and outer map I knew tolerably well, but now a shadow enveloped everything familiar to me in the city.

It took me aback because, for the first time since I returned home from the West, a suspicion dawned in me which had not occurred to me before. I began to suspect that what surrounded me was something worse than the brute force present. I began to suspect that what surrounded me was not just organized terror but an enemy more dangerous than any-

thing else, an enemy against which there is no defense: stupidity. What would happen – and I became sincerely frightened when this possibility dawned on me – what would happen if suddenly someone would declare that everything being planned and put into effect is not merely greedy and brutal but also profoundly, hopelessly unnecessary and stupid? This perspective blinded me. Until then I had never dared to think about this. I was living among individuals who learned by rote and parroted breathlessly that the One Idea is eternal, and indivisible. The person who bases his belief on one book is always dangerous; he is the type who approaches the problems of life without inner flexibility, with previous and rigid assumptions. I moved, listened or argued among people who were willing to bash in others' or their own heads but unwilling to make concessions until they reached a deadend street with their inflexible and obdurate theories. And no one dared to shout that the emperor had no clothes. No one dared to shout that everything that must be changed in the country – everything that survived from the past, that was false, past its time and unjust – could not be altered in the middle of the twentieth century in accord with the catechism of a theory from a hundred years before. And anyone who clings to the Letter of a Hundred Years is stupid because life is not a letter but a process of change. But no one dared to speak about this. The hidebound, grinning, stubborn orthodoxy – as feudalism could in the century following the French Revolution – transplanted "Marxism" into the changed present: that raging and idiotic egoism which wanted to force a society, a people, to live in a way contrary to human nature.

I had never before thought about this. The Communists, the faithful believed more fanatically in the Idea – at which experience had already thumbed its nose – than the scholastic monks believed in the dogma of the medieval Church, for example, in its

dogma of the Immaculate Conception or the Ascension of the Lord into Heaven. It is not possible to debate with fanatics if, on top of it all, they are stupid. I walked along the sun-drenched street in Pest, and following me came the suspicion that no matter which direction I took, the shadow of a great danger crept after me. Stupidity was the danger that cast a shadow on every step I took.

I stopped, I remember, on the corner of Szív Street. This was the moment when I understood that I did not have to go away from something here but toward something. It was like an infarction. But it lasted for only a moment.

Goethe (I don't know why, but Goethe somehow always speaks up in my critical moments) said: "Man must experience his own destiny" – not a factual destiny forced on him by History, but the nonrecurrent, his very own. Perhaps this was possible a hundred years ago. At the time of the French Revolution and also of the Napoleonic Wars, an individual still had the means of turning against the collective destiny adroitly, cunningly. He could hide or build emergency dams hastily in his soul. And a hundred years ago when someone mounted the scaffold or fell on the battlefield, he knew that what was then being consummated personally was his destiny. But today? There is no longer a "personal destiny;" there are only statistical probabilities. One cannot feel it to be personal destiny when an atom bomb explodes or when a dictatorship enunciates an outmoded, stupid judgment on a society. This is why I must go somewhere from this place where, perhaps, it will be possible for me to live my own destiny for a time. Because here I have already become only a piece of data in a category.

Thus did Goethe once again interject himself on the corner of Szív Street. And suddenly it seemed urgent for me to set out – not for the City Park, not even for Buda, not even for the Hungarian language, not for

the solidarity of the family hearth, but farther on. I had to leave the beautiful, sad, wise and colorful city, Budapest, because if I stayed, I would become enmeshed in the aggressive stupidity surrounding me. And I had to take something along with me that is, perhaps, an obsession: the "I," the personality of which there is only a single instance. This "I" is not better, not even different; indeed, possibly it is worse and more inferior than the "I" of others; but for me it is the only one. And no Idea, no Aim can recompense me if I should lose this "I," if I should give up that different kind of homesickness that now permeated me like the emotion of love in the time of youth or the excitement of aspiration. To go from here toward something. This was like a strange inverted "homesickness." (Later, abroad, I never felt homesick.) Actually, what spoke up was not a "longing for home" but a longing for the Earth. And this attraction was precisely the same kind of nostalgically painful restlessness as the one going by the name of homesickness. The longing to see the Earth — the infant, I read, is only four and a half billion years old — to view this provincial, tiny planet from a perspective different from the one I had viewed it from so far, more closely and distantly at the same time, if possible. For the moment the recollection of the Posillipo Light flashed again in my consciousness — to lie for a time with closed eyes in that sunshine, to see that Light once again after so much groping in the fetid, rotten darkness, the mendacious darkness. To smell, touch and taste the Earth, its fruits and meat, to gorge myself on smells and colors, to see the oceans and the distant, remote ports where wild men live who have boomerangs and refrigerators, cars and fetishes, totems and atom bombs, and are thus both frightening and laughable at the same time — to see them actually and not just in my dreams. To see the crumbling shores and the poles of ephemeral, unique and inexplicable Life. To see what the boy sailor saw from the

crow's nest of Columbus's ship when, toward dawn, he began shouting excitedly and hoarsely: "Land, land!" (It is possible that this shouting boy explorer abides in us eternally, in every human being; only he sometimes falls asleep in the crow's nest. Columbus and his crew were still sleeping when land was already looming in the Light.)

I crossed to the other side of the Körönd and quickened my pace. How soon would that train depart for the Earth, for land.

19

It was again an invitation to Switzerland that gave me the opportunity to cross the border. Using the pretext of a literary conference, I received an invitation for me and my family to spend several weeks in Switzerland. (I was delighted by the invitation; the prospect that I would have to participate in a literary conference depressed me because there isn't a more tedious, more deplorable, sillier, social get-together than a literary conference.) In the summer of 1948, it was already not an easy matter to obtain a passport. But it was not as difficult as I imagined either.

The exodus from Hungary after the Second World War, when hundreds of thousands left the country, occurred in three phases: the first in 1945, when those who had pressing reasons to do so fled from the approaching Soviet army and the Communists. The second took place in the summer of 1948, when – just before the Rajk case – the Iron Curtain was still porous: the Communists already occupied every agency, but there was still a "coalition government," many of the officers of the democratic parties still occupied their posts, and many matters could be settled in government bureaus that became impossible a few months later, because the Communists scrapped

the game rules sustaining the democratic comedy and seized power with naked brutality. The summer of 1948 provided the last opportunity for those who wanted to leave the country (and held no political interest to the Communists) to obtain a passport. During these weeks, writers, artists, scholars, teachers and many of the former owners of nationalized companies traveled abroad with legal permission. The third phase of the exodus followed after 1956, when hundreds of thousands fled under dramatic circumstances. Then, for several years, only those whom the Communists ejected or who fled could depart.

Up close, everything was different. When I submitted my request, with the invitation from Switzerland appended, to the passport bureau, I could not positively know what the decision would be. At any rate, I had decided that I would make the trip only if I obtained the passports without conditions attached. It took two months for the reply to arrive. During those two months, no one wanted to talk to me about the matter of the passports. The officials did not tie their issuance to any political or other conditions. I did not have to promise that we would return from abroad after the validity of our travel documents had expired (they were valid for six months and two countries, Switzerland and Italy). No one asked me what I planned to do abroad, whom I wanted to meet. Later, I heard that the "powers-that-be" conferred over my application – one of the Communists' committees and the big-wigs of the coalition parties – and sent it on to a "council," whose members, after a dispute, decided it would be best if I did not disturb the domestic literary atmosphere with my presence and instructed the bureau to issue the passports. The System decided that I was superfluous and of no interest to it. An acquaintance – the very same one who stated that "there are no gentlemen among the Communists" and who then, not much later, was sentenced to seven

years in prison during the Rajk case, looked into the matter of our passports and said it was surprising with what shoulder-shrugging indifference the authorities treated his inquiry. After the lapse of two months, they informed me to stop by and pick up the passports.

The fidgety clerk – he was a bespectacled, punctilious man, not really friendly but not discourteous either – accepted the fees and stamped the documents. The passports were in small booklets bound in dark blue plastic and highlighted by the Kossuth coat of arms. I looked at my passport closely because I suspected that this was the last document that would certify with an official seal that I am Hungarian. Since I had no other official matters to tend to, I stood up and headed for the door. Now something surprising happened: the bespectacled clerk also stood up. He escorted me to the door. There, he bowed and quietly – looking at the floor meanwhile – said: “Goodbye.” He lifted the latch and let me go ahead. Then he shut the door behind me.

Several days later my doorbell rang and an office messenger handed me a “prosecutor’s summons.” At that time, this document was not a welcome invitation. I went to Markó Street; the porter directed me to the attorney on duty. People were nervously pacing the corridors of the large, sinister, notorious building: lawyers, witnesses, and jailers who delivered prisoners in shackles to the courtrooms. Through the open windows could be seen the building’s well for light where executions were carried out. The young attorney on duty looked up with interest when he read my name on the summons. I couldn’t tell what was impending. Snipers can lie in wait in every bush. The attorney assigned me an office messenger and directed him to escort me to the record office, where the pertinent document would be issued to me. After a brief search, the record keeper – an older man, a sad, mil-

dewed officer of the court – produced the prosecutor's petition: an investigation was launched against me for "the circulation of counterfeit money." The charge was true. Several weeks before, I wanted to pay my bus fare of what was then a new one forint piece with a two-forint coin, and the conductor, an insolent "prole," called a policeman, forced me off the bus, and sent me to the police station because the coin was an "Újpest" product and counterfeit. At the police station the facts were taken down – at the time counterfeit forints were circulating briskly in the city, the police were bringing in hourly individuals similarly charged – and I was shown what to watch for in the future if I am paying with a two-forint coin (the reticular grooves of the counterfeit coin's edge-ring were different from the original coin's) and I was let go. But the document had passed from hand to hand, and the record keeper, who registered the document and then handed it to me, shook his head. "Are you getting ready to go abroad, sir?" he asked loudly. "You are right, get out. Sir, there is filth here, there is such filth" – and he spread his arms and pointed to the shelves stacked to the ceiling with dirty dossiers – "such filth..." He did not characterize the amount or the kind of filth in greater detail. He spoke in a loud voice. The office messenger – unshaven, his chin stubbled, his face tormented by misery, dressed in shabby clothes, wearing tennis shoes – stood mutely beside me. Then he escorted me back to the district attorney.

The "procedural disposition" took only a short time. The young attorney leafed through the documents, laughed to himself, stamped on the sheet of paper that he "dropped the charge," and shook hands. "Are you getting ready to go abroad, Editor?" he asked, as the record keeper had. Then quietly: "You are right. It's time to leave, to breathe the air of the West." He said this calmly, as if it was not the district attorney of the People's Republic speaking but an extraterritorial

person. "See the Editor out," he said to the messenger. We stopped at the door, I took out a small banknote. "I don't accept money from a writer," the sad and miserably dressed man said gravely. He turned his back to me and left me at the door. I watched him for a time, the banknote in my hand.

On one of my last nights at home, I encountered a man who created outstanding works in the intellectual sphere, and I knew he thought as I did about many things taking place in Hungary and the world. We had dinner in a Buda restaurant. Of course, this man knew – as did the System and every acquaintance I met at this time – that I was not going on a literary pleasure jaunt but into voluntary exile; already, at this time, no person of sound judgment turned up at home – not even a Communist – who assumed that anyone who rejected the legitimacy of the System would return from abroad if he once got beyond the border. Now this friend, in the quiet hour of farewell, began to speak in a bitter voice. He did not blame me for leaving. He, too, believed that a writer had to take a position in a system which already prohibited not only the freedom to speak and write but also the freedom to be silent. As for him – this was how he put it – he trusted that he would be able to take refuge behind the folding screen of laboratory work and not have to speak up; he was staying home for this reason.

This acquaintance had rejected National Socialism just as he did Communism, and now he looked upon the blossoming of the polarized obsession with the same consternation. Just as a few years earlier the obsession of the leading social strata was that Fascism was the only defense against Bolshevism, so now the guiding personalities of Communist society proclaimed that Bolshevism was the only defense against the – according to them – reviving "imperialist-fascist" peril.

"Still," my friend said, "let's explore in all its consequences what actually happened in Hungary dur-

ing these years. Many of us in the past thought that Hungary's social and economic arrangements and intellectual world concept were ripe for radical change. We 'bourgeois humanists' were unable to shout this conviction to the world with adequate emphasis because the individual proclaiming the 'human measure' in a passionately disunited period always generates discontent: the man in the 'middle' – even the individual of the Aristotelian 'mean' – always remains a left-winger to right-wingers and a suspected right-winger to left-wingers. But we 'bourgeois humanists' wanted many different things: an equitable and judicious land reform that – with compulsory laws of true taxation – would terminate the deep-seated lord-and-servant situation in Hungarian society. We wanted those versions of Socialism protecting workers that had already become a reality in the West. We wanted a humane Hungary in place of the hierarchical 'aristocratic Hungary.' We wanted all this, but we weren't strong and consistent enough to put our intentions into effect. And one day the Red Army appeared, and the Communists following in its footsteps set about turning the country into a colony. Meanwhile, they promised to institute everything in which we believed but for the attainment of which we – the liberals, humanists, democrats – were not strong enough or brave enough. We did not create the 'humane Hungary.' Well then, what do we really want?"

We examined this extraordinary balance sheet for a long time. We even debated whether we were not the deceived, yes, the despairing, because it was not our class, the bourgeois intellectual class that was putting into effect what was ripe for change in Hungary. But regardless of how we put questions to ourselves, the answer was always the same: we cannot accept Communism for social solutions because the attempt is not anthropomorphic and in its ultimate aims serves

not the purposes of Hungary but the colonizing goals of Soviet imperialism.

During the peaceful hour in the deserted garden of the Buda restaurant on this sultry summer evening, on this night when I savored for the last time the sweet flavors of my homeland – the bread, the meat, the fruit, the wine – I felt the moment had arrived when I could ask myself in all sincerity: What is the true meaning of this gigantic dispute? What is Bolshevism? For a hundred years the Communists had laid down the *Manifesto*; for decades this threat has smoldered in the consciousness. Now I recognized something about reality – what the meaning of all this is. It is nothing more than the reign of terror, the violent, merciless, extorting terror of a small band hungry for power and plunder. Is it possible that this system can amend human wretchedness? My friend said that in his view Bolshevism is in its true meaning nothing more than the absolute manifestation of Slav imperialism. But this is merely an advance kindling of a role that now has fatefully received a form: Communism slowly or swiftly outlasts its way of looking at things and its practices, but a modernly prepared great power remains, the Slavs, and they will have to be reckoned with in the following hundred years, even if one day they will no longer be Communists.

We agreed that the Russian people took the Cross of Revolution upon themselves and that this great sacrifice has some kind of meaning for the world. What can this “meaning” be? The appearance of St. John’s man on the world stage, as Schubart maintained – thus the venture of messianically inclined Eastern man appearing in the wake of the Western, “Promethean” man smitten with land ownership who looked at the world as a messianic territory, as had white men looked to Cameroon in the past? Or the “ultimatum” that Bolshevism signifies to society, the ultimatum of just social action? We observed the Russians

and Communists from up close, but we did not encounter any messianically inclined individuals among them. And in place of just social action, they brought nothing other than newer forms of exploitation. Is it possible to hope that the "Ultimatum" will affect Europe like a catalyst and, over and above the two great powers that appeared on the world stage after the Second World War – the United States and the Soviet Union – it will create a more humane Europe which can be the reservation for humaneness in the frightening vista of industry and militarism and, in the process, prove that the Whole is greater than the sum of its constituent parts? We said all this, and then we fell silent because we did not know the answer.

We said goodbye at the street corner, in the night. In farewell, we asked each other's pardon: he for staying at home, I for leaving it.

20

The Arlberg Express left Budapest in early afternoon and reached the Enns bridge after midnight. The Russian soldier again entered the compartment and asked for the passports. He examined the seals, returned the documents and closed the compartment door indifferently.

The night was still. The train started up soundlessly. After a few moments, we left the bridge and traveled on in the star-studded night toward the world where no one was waiting for us. In this moment – for the first time in my life – I really felt fear. I realized I was free. I began to feel fear.

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NOTES

These notes provide information about less familiar historical events and persons and literary figures, particularly Hungarian and Russian, less commonly known details about more familiar happenings and prominent figures, and translations of foreign expressions. Indebtedness is gratefully acknowledged to the edition of the *Memoir* published by the Academy and Helikon presses for the first time in Hungary (1991) for the identification of several Hungarians whom Márai did not name and for particulars about events that occurred in Hungary during and immediately after World War II and the individuals participating in them.

- 24 *Voronezh*: The Second Hungarian Army suffered the nation's worst military defeat at Voronezh in January-February 1943, near the Don River, where it was sent in July 1942 to secure the northern flank of German forces laying siege to Stalingrad. Attacked on January 12, 1943 by Soviet units launching their counter-offensive, the Hungarians began a retreat, during which an estimated 7,000 troops froze to death. The Germans then ordered the Hungarian units into battle to ensure their own escape. About 40,000 Hungarians lost their lives, and about 70,000 wounded and nearly frozen men became Soviet prisoners of war.
- 27 *The Germans occupied Hungary tonight*: the night of March 19, 1944.
- 28 *my first Russian soldier*: The Red Army closed the ring around Budapest on December 26, 1944.
- 29 *pisatiel*: writer. •*Kharasho*: it's all right •*Idi domoi*: go home.
- 30 *the Russian infantry slowly advancing toward Pest*: The assault of the Second and Third Company of the Ukrainian Front began on December 16, 1944.
- 33 *We didn't know about Yalta yet*: The conference at which Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin decided the future of Europe, including that of East European nations, was held at Yalta February 4-11, 1945.
- 36 *Stalingrad*: The battle for Stalingrad raged from August 20, 1942 to February 2, 1943. A major turning point of the war, it marked the deep-

est German advance on the eastern front and the beginning of a successful Russian counteroffensive.

- 38 *Basseneff*: According to the 1991 edition of the *Memoir* published in Hungary, Márai may have in mind B. Bazhanov, Stalin's secretary, who fled to the West and whose book on Stalin appeared as *The Red Dictator* in German and as *With Stalin in the Kremlin* in French.
- 39 "bungalow" furnishings: the kind found in small weekend houses in rural areas.
- 40 *Mikhail Lermontov* (1814–1841): Lermontov's reputation, second in Russia only to Pushkin's, rests on the lyrical and narrative works of his last five years. His caustic wit earned him many enemies, and, like Pushkin, whose death in a duel in 1837 he protested in an inflammatory poem, he was also killed in a duel. •*Cet océan de barbarie puante*: that sea of foul barbarity.
- 42 *Zsigmond Móricz*: (1879–1942), the most important realistic writer of his generation, was the first to write about Hungarian peasants in great detail, showing their poverty but often also the lighter side of their lives with genuine humor.
- 43 *Arrow Cross*: the Hungarian National Socialist Party, headed by Ferenc Szálasi (1897–1946) since October 1, 1940. Szálasi took over the government from Regent Miklós Horthy, who surrendered his office under German pressure. Wearing the title "the Nation's Leader," Szálasi established a totally fascist regime and began the reign of terror with his Arrow-Cross gangs in the limited territory under his control that brought about Hungary's complete ruin. In 1946, he was sentenced to death by the People's Tribunal of Hungary and executed.
- 46 *dompteur*: subduer, vanquisher, tamer.
- 47 *Mikhail Kutuzov* (1745–1813) is the Russian general who fought Napoleon at Austerlitz in 1805 and led the czar's forces against Napoleon at the battle of Borodino in 1812.
- 49 *The siege of Budapest* began on January 22, 1945 and led to its liberation on February 10, 1945, except for Castle and Gellért hills. It took the Russians 49 days to capture the capital.
- 50 *Ilya Ehrenburg* (1891–1967) wrote novels but is most noted for his articles about the two world wars. Much of his later journalism was highly critical of the United States.

- 54 *Zoro and Huru* were two Danish comedians who were very popular in early European films. Zoro was tall and thin, Huru short and fat. Their original names were Fy and By, but they became Pat and Patachon in Italy, Long and Short in England and Zoro and Huru in Hungary. Zoro was played by Carl Schenström (1881–1942), Huru by Harald Madsen (1890–1949). •*homo ludens*: the playful, frolicking man.
- 56 *Vladimir Mayakovsky* (1893–1930) was not only a pre-eminent poet of the 1917 Revolution, but a leading light of Russian futurism. Disillusioned with Bolshevism and unhappy over a love affair with a married woman, he shot himself to death.
- 57 *Osip Dymov* (1878–1959), a very popular Russian writer of stories, plays and humorous pieces, emigrated to the United States in 1913. •*Arkadi Averchenko* (1881–1925): a humorist whose satirical weekly was the most popular journal in Russia from 1908 to 1913. After the 1917 Revolution, he fled to Constantinople and finally settled in Prague. •*Mikhail Artsibashev* (1878–1927), a short-story writer and novelist and major participant in many literary and critical disputes in the years preceding World War I, emigrated to Warsaw in 1923, where he edited an anti-Soviet newspaper. •*Aleksandr Kuprin* (1870–1938), a novelist and short-story writer, left Russia in 1919 and lived mostly in Paris for the next 17 years. Gravely ill, he returned to his native land in 1937 and died there the following year. •*Ivan Bunin* (1870–1953): a novelist and poet and a last representative of classical Russian realism. A political reactionary and an implacable foe of the Revolution, Bunin left Russia in 1919 and settled in Grasse, a city in Southern France near the coast. •*Dmitri Merezhkovsky* (1865–1941), a novelist, poet, dramatist, critic and religious and social thinker, was forced into exile temporarily in 1905 because he supported the Revolution and permanently after 1920 because he openly opposed Bolshevism, which he attacked in *The Kingdom of Antichrist* (1921) and other works. •*Leonid Andreyev* (1871–1919): a Russian prose writer and dramatist. The social protest in his early stories attracted Gorky's support, but his open opposition to Bolshevism ended their friendship. When the Bolsheviks seized power, he went to Finland, where he died in 1919.
- 58 *Nikolai Gogol* (1800–1852), the author of *Dead Souls* (1842), was the father of Russian realism. This novel's chief character, Chichikov, buys the names of dead serfs from landowners in order to mortgage them as property. •*Ivan Goncharov* (1812–1891) wrote *Oblomov* (1838), a realistic and satirical novel portraying the indolent nobleman so common in the Russia of his time. "Oblomovism" was coined to describe the lassitude typified by its central character. •*Maxim Gorky*: See pp. 221–223 for Márai's discussion of his attitudes. •*Aleksandr Fadeyev* (1901–1956), a novelist, fought in the 1917 Revol-

ution. In 1953, at the beginning of de-Stalinization, he was relieved of the chairmanship of the Writers' Union. With his role diminished and deeply depressed by the decimation of literary professionals during the Stalin purges, he committed suicide. •*Anton Marchenko* (1888–1939), a teacher, social worker and educational theorist, successfully organized in 1920 the Gorky Colony for the "bezprizorniks," the children made homeless by the Revolution. *A Book for Parents* (1954) is a guide to child-rearing presented in the form of fictional case studies. Marchenko maintained that the family as a unit must cast off bourgeoisie, patterns of aristocracy and exploitation and become a collective unit dedicated to the larger socialist society. •*Fyodor Gladkov* (1883–1958): His *Cement* (1925) portrays the national effort at reconstruction in the Soviet Union following the 1917 Revolution and the accompanying Civil War. •*Mikhail Sholokhov* (1905–1984), officially regarded as the greatest Soviet prose writer, gained international fame with the epic novel of his native land: *The Silent Don* (1925–40), translated as *And Quiet Flows the Don* (1934), and *The Don Flows Home to the Sea* (1940), the classic portrayal of the 1917 Revolution and the Civil War and their impact on the lives of the Don Cossacks. Sholokhov, the first Soviet poet laureate and the recipient of the Stalin and Lenin prizes, won the Nobel Prize in 1965, the first Soviet author so honored.

- 60 *Hitler Jugend*: the Nazi Party's youth organization (1926–1945), and the only such organization in Germany after 1936. Beginning in 1939, every ten- to eighteen-year-old youth had to become a member.
- 62 *the Kosztolányi story*: The episode about the Bulgarian conductor takes place in *Esti Kornél* (1933). See pp. 134–154 for Márai's personal recollections of Kosztolányi.
- 64 *near Esztergom, the German high command had launched a counter-attack*: The Germans attempted to break the Russian encirclement of Budapest from January 1 to 26, 1945. They temporarily retook Esztergom, situated on the Danube near the Czechoslovakian border, on January 6.
- 66 *Yekaterinburg* is the last resting place of Czar Nicholas II, his wife, Alexandra, and three of their five children, who were assassinated on July 17, 1918. •*galoppierende*: the "sprinter," the "virulent."
- 67 *NKVD*: Russian acronym for People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (1934–43), which was responsible for all places of detention and the regular police in the Soviet Union.

- 68 *the Mohács disaster*: On August 29, 1526, Louis II of Hungary and Bohemia and his army of 28,000 were crushed by Suleiman I of Turkey and his army of 200,000. The king and nearly 25,000 of his troops were killed in the battle; the rest were taken captive and beheaded. The defeat produced more than 150 years of Ottoman domination in Hungary. A dramatic memorial marks the site in honor of the slain, whom Hungarians have ever since the disaster regarded as martyrs to Christianity and Hungarian independence.
- 71 *small town near our place*: Szentendre, on the Danube, which was liberated on December 25, 1945.
- 72 *Béla*: Béla III, who reigned from 1173 to 1196, also seized Byzantium's two border strongholds, Baranch and Belgrade. •*Stephen III* ruled from 1162 to 1172. •*Saint Ladislav*, or Ladislav I, reigned from 1077 to 1095.
- 73 *the Bulgarians... sought the protection of mighty Byzantium, and Eastern Christianity*: The king of Byzantium won a major victory over the Bulgarians in 1014, and Bulgaria ceased to exist in 1018. Byzantium expanded its rule to the Balkans and became Hungary's neighbor until 1187, when Bulgaria freed itself of Byzantium's rule. •*King Stephen I* (c. 975–1038) ruled Hungary from 1000–1038. Stephen crowned himself as Hungary's first Christian king with a crown sent to him by Pope Sylvester II. Stephen's crown remained the sacred symbol of Hungary's national existence through the centuries. It came into the possession of the United States after World War II, was kept in a secret place, and was returned only on January 8, 1978 as a gesture of good will toward the Hungarian people. Its return was long opposed by Hungarians in America, particularly émigrés.
- 77 *Stalin pipe organs*: launchers mounted on trucks that fired sixteen rockets simultaneously.
- 78 *the powerful military forces of the Soviet Union attacked little Finland*: The attack on November 30, 1939 was prompted, according to the Russians, by the need to protect their borders. Despite fierce Finnish resistance, Soviet troops achieved victory in February 1940, and the peace treaty was signed on March 12. Finland's heroic defense against overwhelming forces aroused worldwide sympathy and admiration.
- 79 *mashtierskaia*: a workshop.
- 81 *otherwise, all their tools... came from America*: Beginning in October 1941, the United States began shipping tanks, airplanes and other

armaments to the ports of Murmansk and Archangel, as well as food, clothing, industrial products and other supplies.

- 84 *Narodniks*: Russian populists, adherents of an agrarian socialist movement active from the 1860s to the end of the 19th century who tried to adapt socialist doctrine to conditions in Russia. • *Mensheviks*: "members of the minority" who opposed the organizational principles proposed by Lenin, who headed the Bolsheviks, "members of the majority," preferring a loosely structured mass party to Lenin's small, disciplined one. They believed that Russia could not pass directly from its backward state to proletariat rule, but must first develop an intermediary bourgeois regime. • *Trotskyites*: followers of Leon Trotsky (1879–1940), whose theory of permanent revolution held that in Russia a bourgeois and a socialist revolution could be combined and that a proletarian revolution would then spread throughout the world. Stalin ordered him to leave the USSR in 1949. After asylums in Turkey, France and Norway, Trotsky settled in Mexico City in 1937, where he was assassinated in August 1940.
- 87 *Milovan Djilas* (1911–1995), a chief adviser to Marshal Broz Tito and outspoken critic of Yugoslavia's becoming a Soviet satellite, was once considered a possible successor to Tito, but in 1954, he was abruptly dismissed from the presidency of the Federal Assembly's Advisory Council just as he was about to assume the post. His support of the 1956 Hungarian uprising led to his imprisonment, and his term was extended in 1957 on the publication in the West of *The New Class: An Analysis of the System*, which characterized the Communist oligarchy as a new group of privileged and parasitical tyrants. Released in 1961, he was rearrested in 1962, then finally freed in 1966.
- 88 *GEPU*, or *GPU*: Successor, in 1922, to the Cheka (Russian acronym for All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for the Suppression of Counterrevolution and Sabotage), its functions were transferred to the NKVD in 1934. • *Lenskys and Onegins in the great Russian poem*: Aleksander Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* (1831), a verse novel of contemporary Russian society.
- 90 *André Gide* (1869–1951) was controversial for his espousal and subsequent rejection of Communism after a visit to the Soviet Union. Filled with hope in Communism before his 1936 visit, he expressed his disillusionment at the conditions he observed in *Return from the USSR* (1936) and *Afterthoughts on the USSR* (1937). The former work was published in Hungarian in November 1936, the latter in June 1937.

- 91 *The prophecy went like this:* The quotation is from the introduction to the 1882 Russian edition of Marx and Engels's *The Communist Manifesto*, according to the 1991 edition of the *Memoir* published in Hungary.
- 95 *tchervonietz*: a five or ten-ruble gold coin and a Soviet ten ruble bank-note in the 1920s, which also served as a monetary standard.
- 108 *j'ai vécu*: "I stayed alive." A remark by Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès (1748–1836), a clergyman whose concept of popular sovereignty guided the French bourgeoisie in their struggle against the monarchy and nobility early in the French Revolution and helped to bring Napoleon Bonaparte to power in 1799. During the Reign of Terror, he withdrew from the political scene, and later epitomized that act in this manner.
- 109 *the chief editor of a Catholic newspaper*: László Tóth (1889–1951), editor and editor-writer of *Nemzeti Újság* (People's News) from 1922–44, was sentenced to ten years in prison at the 1949 Mindszenty trial. Cardinal József Mindszenty (1892–1975), was arrested on December 23, 1948, on charges of criminal activity, espionage and illegal monetary transactions. He was sentenced to life imprisonment on February 8, 1949, by the People's Court in Budapest. He was released from prison in 1955 because of ill health but kept under strict surveillance. Freed during the 1956 Revolution, he received sanctuary in the American Embassy when the Russian Army crushed the uprising. He refused to leave Hungary unless the Kádár government rescinded his conviction and sentence. He left the embassy in 1971 for the Vatican when the Hungarian government and the Vatican reached an agreement. He shortly left the Vatican to settle in Vienna. Hoping to improve church relations with Hungary, Pope Paul VI removed Mindszenty as primate of Hungary in 1974.
- *60 *Andrássy Road*: The building was formerly occupied by the Arrow Cross. From 1945 on, it was the headquarters of the ÁVÓ, Hungarian acronym for State Security Department, the feared and hated police of the Rákosi government.
- 120 *jancsibankó*: "Johnny notes," a wage voucher or draft money, or valueless paper. Formerly, they were vouchers issued to workers that could be redeemed in stores maintained by the factory owner. They were banned in 1884 by law but continued to be used in many places until World War I.
- 124 *"What concern of mine are the sins of the world?"*: The quote is from *Book of Jonah* (1939) by Mihály Babits (1883–1941), one of the leading lights of 20th-century Hungarian literature. Learned and versatile, he is most noted for his lyric poems. He also popularized the

discursive essay and translated numerous works from English, French, German, Greek, Italian and Latin.

- 127 *Fyodor Tolbukhin* (1884–1949) was the commander of the 57th Army at Stalingrad and the 3rd Ukrainian Front from May 1944 to June 1945. • *Faubourg Saint-Germain*: the old aristocratic quarter in the suburbs of Paris, renowned for its Bourbon palace with its library painted by Delacroix and the Palais-Biron housing the Rodin museum.
- 128 *The Time of Liberation*: April 4, 1945, the date that the Red Army drove the last German forces out of Hungary, after 194 days of battle. It was declared a national holiday on April 2, 1950 by the Rákosi government.
- 129 *as Ady lamented*: Endre Ady (1877–1919), one of Hungary's greatest poets, is the undisputed precursor of early Hungarian modernism. He is a Symbolist, but he draws on the biblical and rural elements of earlier centuries and embraces themes on all aspects of Hungarian life and issues.
- 131 *lege artis*: according to its form and manner.
- 135 *Bálint Balassi* (1554–1594) was the first to write distinguished lyric poems in the Hungarian language. His love poems, comprising his best writings, blend the love poetry of European humanism with many elements of Hungarian folk poetry. • *Péter Pázmány* (1570–1637) a Catholic prelate, elevated to cardinal by Pope Urban VIII in 1629, is regarded as the best prose writer of the Hungarian Counter-Reformation for his masterly baroque style. His works show the influence of European cultural and artistic developments, and his use of his native language in his writings anticipated the future of Hungarian literary prose. His most important work is a two-volume collection of Sunday sermons published in the year of his death. • *Miklós Zrínyi* (1620–1664), a poet, writer on military science, statesman and general, was a towering figure in baroque literature and a major contributor to the development of Hungarian literature. *Peril at Sziget* (1651), the best epic of its time, celebrates his great-grandfather's defense of the fortification at Szigetvár in 1566 against the forces of Suleiman II, who was on his way to lay siege to Vienna. The Hungarian defenders launched an attack from the flaming ruins of the fortification, and every one of them fell in armed combat. • *the Guardsmen writers*: Hungarians who served in Maria Theresa's Royal Hungarian Guards in Vienna in the last quarter of the 18th century. Becoming acquainted there with the ideas of the French Enlightenment, they led efforts to revive forms of literary expression in Hungary, including the enrichment of the Hungarian lan-

guage. •*Mihály Csokonai Vitéz* (1773–1805), who used mainly the rococo style, was the best lyrical poet of Hungary's literary revival. The versatility and artistry of his versification were new in Hungarian poetry. •*Zoltán Somlyó* (1882–1937), called the poet of solitude, expresses the pains of loneliness and the feelings of love, and gives a major place to a bohemian anarchism and an attitude of "art for art's sake" in his poems. •*Finno-Ugrian*: a subdivision of the Uralic subfamily of the Uralic-Altaic languages. It contains two subgroups: the Finnic of Eastern Europe, which includes Finnish, Estonian and Lapp, and the Ugric, such as Hungarian, its principal member, and Vogul. Its grammar is agglutinative, especially in its mode of adding several suffixes to a single unchanging root or stem to indicate such features as case, number, person, tense and mode.

136 *Lebedia*: a plain between the Lower Don and the Lower Volga where the ancient Hungarian tribes pitched their camp in the mid-9th century before continuing their westward migration. Apparently, it obtained its name from an ancient tribal chieftain. •*Benedek Virág* (1754–1831), a member of the Classical School in Hungarian literature, is often called the "Hungarian Horace," whose works he translated. His contemporaries thought of him as the father of Hungarian literature, and many young writers sought him out. He lived in poor economic circumstances in the Tabán district in Buda for more than thirty years, subsisting on a small pension and the secret help of his friends.

137 *homo aestheticus*: a person focused on pure contemplation and reverie.

138 *Dániel Berzsenyi* (1776–1836), a poet with a strong current of romanticism in his writings, used Greek and Latin verse forms and assimilated them into Hungarian poetry more successfully than did members of the Classical School. •*Ferenc Kazinczy* (1759–1831) was a major force in Hungary's literary revival at the turn of the 19th century with his numerous translations, voluminous correspondence, original works and unflagging efforts to shape literary developments and tastes in his times. •*János Arany* (1817–1882) is Hungary's greatest narrative poet and a creator of a realistic poetry grounded in folk traditions. He wrote lyric poetry, but his epic poems, presenting the legendary and historical past as taking place in his own times, are better, especially his ballads. His vast knowledge of European culture is reflected in his writings, and his translations of Shakespeare and Aristophanes (see the note for p. 377) are landmarks in the history of translation in Hungary. •*Jenő Heltai* (1871–1957), a prose writer and playwright, was a meticulous portrayer of Budapest and Parisian life in a romantic-ironic vein. His humorous writings are playfully critical of society, man and ideas. Un-

conventional in his use of words, he introduced many new expressions into the Hungarian language. •*Ernő Szép* (1884–1953), a poet, writer of fiction and dramatist, is regarded by many as the best representative of Impressionism and the Decadent School in Hungarian literature. He shunned contemporary problems as themes, preferring to celebrate nostalgic longings for youthful purity and a better world for humanity, and painted vivid portraits of Budapest life and ordinary people. •*Attila József* (1905–1937) is one of the most significant poets in 20th-century Hungarian literature. Humanism and the desire to unite with the world around him pervade his poems. He translated many authors as well as European and African folk poetry. •*flatus*: breathing, puffing. •*Lőrinc Szabó* (1900–1957), a poet, experimented with a broad range of forms and literary principles, but was basically a member of the Decadent School. His poems are concerned with the individual's struggle in an indifferent cosmos and pessimistic in their outlook. A prolific translator, his translations include the works of Shakespeare, Coleridge, Omar Khayyám, Baudelaire, Villon, Goethe, Pushkin and Mayakovsky.

139 *Sartre wrote it*: in his *What is Literature?* (1947).

141 *Mór Jókai* (1825–1904), Hungary's most successful author of romantic fiction, established the novel as a genre in the nation's literature. His novels and short stories, filled with exotica and fantasy from all ages and regions of the world, depict an ideal world and cultivate an optimistic view to sustain the hope of Hungarians for a better life.

142 *the Compromise of 1867*: the historical agreement between Austria and Hungary long after the failure of the 1848–1849 Revolution which created the governing structure of a dual monarchy between the two nations and established internal independence for Hungary but installed common ministries for foreign affairs and defense, each under a joint minister.

145 *Trianon Hungary*: the Hungary after the Treaty of Trianon (1920), which broke up the Austro-Hungarian Empire and disposed of Hungarian territories. Rumania received Transylvania; Czechoslovakia Slovakia and Ruthenia; Yugoslavia Croatia, Slovenia and part of the Bánát, thus depriving Hungary of two-thirds of its territory, along with some of its most valuable natural resources, and transferring about three million Hungarians to these three countries. Today, Hungarians form the largest minority in Europe, aside from Russians in former Soviet republics: 2.2 million in Rumania, (11 per cent of the population), nearly 600,000 in Slovakia (7 per cent of the population) and 385,000 in Serbia, significant numbers for a nation with a population of 10.4 million. •*Kálmán Mikszáth* (1847–1910) is one of the foremost figures in Hungarian prose fiction. His novels

and short stories delineate the life of peasants, the inhabitants of small towns, the landed gentry and the proprietor class satirically and ironically in a style between romanticism and realism to begin a new period in the Hungarian novel. •*Gyula Krúdy* (1878–1933) is one of the most significant writers in 20th-century Hungarian prose fiction. His recollections of his early life and experiences in Budapest form the basic material of his writings. His special quality lies in the evocation of moods and sentiments that create a dreamworld from which reality is viewed. See Márai's discussion of Krúdy, pp. 339–349. •*Mihály Vörösmarty* (1800–1855), the most important writer in Hungarian romanticism, translated Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, *King Lear* and part of *Romeo and Juliet*. •*Sándor Petőfi* (1823–1849), whose poems had a major impact on the developments in Hungarian poetry, translated Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*. •*the "Nyugat" generation*: Hungarian authors who followed the literary tenets and intellectual and social orientation of the *Nyugat* (West, 1908–1941), the most influential literary and critical periodical in 20th-century Hungarian literature, which cultivated the impressionist-symbolist forms of modern West European literature in its pages and transmitted much knowledge of liberalism and contemporary West European literature, especially that of France, to Hungarian literature and culture. Among its members were the already-mentioned Endre Ady, Mihály Babits, Jenő Heltai, Dezső Kosztolányi, Zsigmond Móricz, Zoltán Somlyó and Ernő Szép. Márai is himself counted among the members of the second *Nyugat* generation.

- 148 *Dezső Szabó* (1879–1945). His novels and writings on current affairs greatly influenced young intellectuals between the two world wars. Szabó, determined to reform Hungarian society, was strongly didactic in his imaginative writings. He looked upon the qualities of the peasant as the basis on which to preserve and develop Hungary as a nation. Already ill, he died of starvation during the siege of Budapest.
- 149 *Harold Sidney Hamsworth Rothermere* (1868–1940), the English publisher and politician who in the 1920s advocated the revision of the provisions of the Treaty of Trianon, a position that made him extremely popular in Hungary. Kosztolányi, who was president of the Hungarian PEN Club, interviewed him in London in November 1931, and at the end of their conversation, Rothermere gave him 1,000 forints to award to the translators of two outstanding works. Kosztolányi's presenting the awards to Gyula Krúdy and Zsigmond Móricz provoked so much invective that he resigned from the presidency of the literary organization.
- 151 *Knickerbocker hat*: a hat made of a wool and cotton cloth fabric resembling tweed.

- 153 *Anna Édes*: the title of Kosztolányi's novel, which was published in 1926.
- 156 *wondrous stag*: According to the Hungarian myth on the origin of the Hungarians, a stag with magical and shiny antlers led two young princes into the Maetian marshes in the vicinity of Persia and then vanished. The two hunters were named Hunor and Magor, the Huns being the descendants of the former and the Magyars (the Hungarians) of the latter. •*the bridges over the Danube were blown up*: The three bridges connecting the center of the city with Buda were all destroyed: the Margaret Bridge on November 4, 1944, the Chain and Elizabeth bridges on January 18, 1945.
- 158 *Aladár Schöppflin* (1872–1950) was a highly regarded literary historian and translator, and a leading critic for the *Nyugat* from the time of its founding in 1908.
- 161 *pathei mathos*: the myth of suffering. "Men shall learn wisdom by affliction schooled." – from Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*.
- 162 *Károly Péterfalvi Szakmáry* (1831–1891). His nearly thirty novels, mostly historical, have left no trace of his literary character in public readership. In his later years, he turned to the events of the 1848–1849 Hungarian Revolution against Austria, in which he had fought and been taken prisoner. *Etelka*, which was written by András Dugonics (1740–1818) and not by Szakmáry, was significant even in Hungarian preromanticism in its turning to the nation's past and in its unquestioning support of the nation and its people. •*a countess...who occasionally published...under the pseudonym "Szikra"*. Mrs. Sándor Teleki (1864–1937), whose very popular novels depicted the lives of the aristocracy and gentry. She was co-president of the Hungarian Writers Circle, which she helped to found in 1924. Her best known novel is *The Immigrants* (1898).
- 164 *Die Mache*: make-believe, window-dressing.
- 166 *the Regent*: Miklós Horthy (1868–1957), who governed Hungary from 1920 to 1944 as head of state and was a nationalist with strong rightist leanings, allied Hungary with Germany in 1941, but when Russian troops entered Hungary, he sent an armistice commission to Moscow and announced Hungary's surrender in October 1944. The Germans forced him to rescind the order of surrender and sent him to Bavaria, where he was later freed by United States troops. He was a witness at the Nürnberg war trials and settled in Portugal in 1949, where he died eight years later.
- 168 *decent*: proper, decent.

- 171** *they did not pay the progressive real inheritance tax:* The tax system developed in Hungary after the 1848-49 Revolution greatly favored the owners of medium and large landed estates.
- 175** *a liberal newspaper:* Márai contributed regularly to the *Újság* (News) and the *Pesti Hírlap* (Pest News), both independent political dailies and the latter the publisher of writings by the established writers of the time, including (besides Márai) the already-mentioned Mikszáth, Heltai, Krúdy, Móricz and Kosztolányi. •*the Kossuth Danube Confederation:* the plan of Lajos Kossuth (1802-1894), the hero of Hungary's 1848-49 rebellion against Austria and recognized as a symbol of revolutionary nationalism, to unite Hungary, Croatia, Serbia and Rumania into a federation. •*the plebiscite:* on the question of Austria's uniting with Germany, which was postponed at Hitler's demand and aborted by the entry of German forces into Austria. •*Krákóczy:* a portmanteau word blending *krákog* (to hawk, hem or hack) with Rákóczi (Ferenc Rákóczi II, 1676-1735), prince of Transylvania, who led a rebellion against the Habsburgs for an independent Hungary from 1703 to 1711.
- 176** *Kurt von Schuschnigg* (1897-1977) was the chancellor of Austria from 1934 to 1938, the last four years of republican Austria. Facing a massive German invasion and knowing he could not depend on foreign support, Schuschnigg yielded to Hitler's demands at Berchtesgaden on February 12, 1938. On March 9, hoping to restore the independence of Austria fully, he announced his plans to hold a plebiscite on the issue on March 13. On March 11 Hitler demanded its postponement and Schuschnigg's resignation. The chancellor met the demands, but the German army, with Hitler at its head, invaded Austria and entered Vienna on March 12.
- 180** *a short, bespectacled man:* Count Pál Teleki (1879-1941), prime minister from 1920 to 1921 and 1939 to 1941. Appointed to that post by Horthy, Teleki engineered the ratification of the Treaty of Trianon, having served at the Paris Peace Conference (1919-1920) as the official geographic expert in the Hungarian delegation. He then retired from politics. Recalled in 1939, he signed the Berlin Pact (1940), which made Hungary a member of the Axis, headed by Germany, Italy and Japan and founded a military alliance that now included Hungary, Rumania, Bulgaria, Slovakia and Croatia. Teleki also concluded a mutual-assistance treaty with Yugoslavia, and when in 1941 he realized that Germany would force Hungary to invade Yugoslavia, he committed suicide during the night of April 2-3, 1941.
- 182** *Guillaume Apollinaire* (1880-1918), leader of the avant-garde in Paris during the first two decades of the 20th century, introduced

Cubism in his book *The Cubist Painters* (1913). His only play, *The Breasts of Tiresias* (1918), mistakenly subtitled "Surrealist" instead of "Surnaturalistic Drama" by his publisher, is one of the earliest examples of Surrealism. •*Rainer Maria Rilke* (1875–1926), a German poet and novelist born in Czechoslovakia, achieved his first real fame with *Poems from the Book of Hours* (1905), which treated God as an evolutionary concept. He became widely known in Hungary through a 1919 translation of selected poems by Sándor Reményik (1890–1941), who lived in Rumania between the two world wars, and whose early poems dealt with the injustices suffered by Hungarians living in Rumania because of the Treaty of Trianon. •*Nikolai Bukharin* (1888–1938) participated in the Bolshevik Revolution in November 1917 and became a leader in the Comintern, the editor of *Pravda* (later *Izvestia*) and full member of the Politburo in 1924. He lost his major posts in 1929 because he opposed Stalin's policies. In 1938, he was tried publicly and executed.

- 183 *Rosa Luxemburg* (1870–1919), a German revolutionary of Polish origin, helped to form the Spartacus Party in Germany during World War I and edited its organ, *Red Flag*. Arrested for her role in the Spartacist uprising in Berlin, she was killed by soldiers while being transported to prison. •*Karl Radek* (1885–1939?), a long-time international Communist leader and journalist, became a leading member of the Comintern. His influence began to decline because the Comintern failed to bring about a Communist takeover in Germany. In 1924, he lost his seat on the Party's Central Committee. Expelled from the party in 1927, he recanted and was readmitted in 1930. He was an editorial writer for *Izvestia* from 1931 to 1937 and also a co-author of the 1936 Stalin constitution. Accused of treason during the party purges of the 1930s, he confessed at the so-called Trial of the Seventeen in 1937 and was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment. He is believed to have died in a prison camp under unknown circumstances. •*Hungary was also mute*: On March 15, 1938, three days after German troops entered Austria, the Hungarian ambassador to Germany extended his government's congratulations to the foreign office in Berlin at the "reunification" of Germany and Austria.

- 184 *Count István Széchenyi* (1791–1860), a forceful advocate of economic, social and intellectual life who stimulated liberal thought in Hungary, fell in love in 1824 with Countess Crescentia Seilern, the wife of Count Károly Zichy, and waited to 1836 to marry her after she became a widow. They were wed in the church on Krisztina Square, where a memorial tablet commemorates the occasion.

- 185 *prósza*: "spósz," a sweet dish made of flour browned in lard. – *sterc*: a dish made of potatoes or flour in lard and onions.

- 187 *Ban Bánk (1821)*, a classic tragedy by József Katona (1791–1830), and one of the first significant plays in Hungarian, deals with a conspiracy at the court of King Andrew II (1205–1235). It was set to music by Ferenc Erkel (1810–1893) and became Hungary's most popular opera.
- 194 *The Commission of Human Rights* was established by Chapter 10 of the United Nations Charter, as a result of the horrors perpetrated during World War II, to protect basic human rights under its Economic and Social Council. Its draft, "Universal Declaration of Human Rights," was formally adopted by the General Assembly on December 10, 1948.
- 197 *Biblia pauperum*: books of the poor. Medieval picture books, often using Latin inscriptions that took the place of the *Bible* outside clerical circles.
- 198 *prímás*: the leader of a Gypsy band, who plays the first violin.
- 200 *Auschwitz*: Most Hungarian Jews sent into forced labor were killed in this German concentration camp.
- 202 *trabukó*: a kind of cigar.
- 203 *What did the Jewish police officer request?: Béla Zerkovitz (1882–1948)*, Jewish composer, is one of the best known and most assailed representatives of light music in Hungary. He always wrote his own lyrics for his songs and music hall ditties, and composed several highly successful operettas. • *a song by a composer*: as opposed to a folksong.
- 207 *the Council for Social Reconciliation* was established in Budapest in April 1946 to monitor signs of anti-Semitism still present in Hungary and to reconcile the antagonisms between Jews and Hungarians. • *The chief rabbi wore...the Catholic bishop*: In Hungary, all denominations had their own military chaplains with officer rank until 1950, after the Rákosi government came to power.
- 209 *staretz*: an old Greek Orthodox priest.
- 210 *Katyn*: The Germans announced, in 1943, that they had unearthed the remains of thousands of Polish officers in the Katyn forests, near Smolensk, and claimed that evidence suggested the Soviets had massacred them. Moscow denied the charge and asserted that the Nazis were responsible for the atrocity. Only recently has the matter been cleared up. Mikhail S. Gorbachev first admitted Soviet responsibility, in April 1990, but it was President Boris N. Yeltsin who, on

October 13, 1992, released two folders of secret documents from the Communist Party Central Committee's archives disclosing that the extermination of the Polish officers was directly organized by the Party's leaders. Their decision read: "Transfer to the USSR NKVD the papers concerning 14,700 former Polish officers, officials, landowners, policemen and gendarmes, held in camps for prisoners of war, as well as the papers concerning members of different subversion and espionage organizations, former officials and former clergymen, arrested and held in jails in the western regions of Ukraine and Belarus – a total of 11,000 people, whose cases must be considered in keeping with a special procedure and who must be subject to the supreme punishment—execution by a firing squad. The consideration of the cases must be carried out without summoning of the arrested people to the court and without presenting them with indictments." – from *The New York Times*, October 14, 1992.

- 216** *One of them...an outstanding writer:* very probably Lajos Nagy (1883–1954), one of the most important writers of prose fiction between the two world wars, and now looked upon as a realistic writer with a socialistic outlook who influenced authors of the generation after 1945. He supported the Revolutionary Government of 1918–19. During World War II, he opened a small bookstore and joined the Communist Party after 1945.
- 217** *Bucsinzsky Café:* Among its habitués were such leftist writers as György Bálint (1905–1943), a distinguished Hungarian leftist critic and publicist between the two world wars, Attila József, Antal Szerb, a gifted literary historian and critic, Lajos Nagy and members of the Hungarian Theater. The fates of Bálint and Szerb call for further attention. Bálint, a Jew, was ordered into a forced labor camp but soon discharged. Arrested in April 1942, he was confined to a military prison. He escaped but was recaptured and sent to a labor camp and then shipped off to the Ukraine, where he died in a labor camp. Szerb, also a Jew, was pressed into a labor camp twice during the war, and, starving, was beaten to death by the Arrow Cross.
- 218** *Waving the flaming torch:* a reference to a play, *Flaming Torch* (1953) by Gyula Illyés (1902–1983), one of the most influential poets in 20th-century Hungarian literature and an especially gifted translator.
- 219** *The leader of one of these newly organized special parties was a peasant from the Alföld:* Péter Veres (1897–1970), whose novels and short stories delineate the lives of peasants and villagers in a realistic style, at times satirical and humorous. Often arrested for his political activities, he was sent to forced labor camps on three occasions

during World War II. He was president of the National Peasant Party from 1945 to 1949, minister of defense from 1947 to 1948 in the coalition government, and president of the Writers's Union from 1954 to 1956. The Alföld is the Great Plain, the rich agricultural region of Hungary. •*Kálmán Rózsahegyi* (1873–1961), a celebrated representative of realistic acting and a member of the National Theater, was renowned for his character roles. He played the gravedigger in *Hamlet* and the madman in *Lear* and *Twelfth Night*, Rageneau in Rostand's *Cyrano* and Jacob in Molière's *The Miser*. •*Raymond Aron* (1905–1983) a sociologist, philosopher and political commentator, was well known for his skepticism of ideological orthodoxies. Once Sartre's close colleague, Aron criticized Sartre and Marxists for their unquestioning support of the Soviet Union in his *Opium of the Intellectuals* (1955).

- 220 *Religion is the opium of the masses*: a part of Karl Marx's criticism of Hegel's system as it was interpreted in the post-Hegelian circles of the Left.
- 221 *He wrote this in Sorrento*: Gorky, the father of Soviet literature and the founder of the doctrine of socialist realism, exhausted by his work as the director of the State Publishing House and bouts of tuberculosis, and disillusioned with the Soviet Union in its first years after the Revolution, sought rest abroad, mainly in Sorrento, Italy, from 1921 to 1928.
- 224 *In Czechoslovakia – in the only European country to opt for Communism through a democratic, secret election*: Since the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia won just 50 per cent of the vote in the elections of May 26, 1946, the other political parties tried to end the Communists' dominance in the fall of 1947, but the Communists, threatening a general strike after several ministers stepped down, succeeded in persuading the head of state, Eduard Benes, to appoint a new coalition cabinet. Klement Gottwald became prime minister. •*The Ivan Denisovitches*: a reference to Aleksander Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (1968), a grim account of life in Soviet forced labor camps. •*a deported Russian, a certain Marchenko*: Anatoly Marchenko (1938–1986), the son of an impoverished railwayman and not a professional writer, was often imprisoned and sent to work camps on various charges, such as high treason, passport violation and anti-Soviet defamation. He died on December 8, 1986 of a brain hemorrhage in the sixth year of a 15-year prison term during a hunger strike he hoped would gain amnesty for all political prisoners. The book Márai discusses is entitled *My Testimony* (1966), an account of the penal conditions Marchenko endured. It was published in Russia for the first time in 1991.

225 *after Khrushchev's downfall:* He was forced out on October 15, 1964.

• *Yuly Daniel* (1925–1988), *Andrey Siniavsky* (b. 1925) were both tried for publishing works under the pseudonyms "Nikolai Arzhak" and "Abram Terts," respectively, in the West which allegedly slandered the Soviet Union. They became symbols of the oppressed artist and the most famous prisoners in the Soviet Union. Daniel, who permitted some of his short stories to appear abroad, was arrested on September 12, 1965, and charged with publishing "anti-Soviet short stories abroad" and circulating them among friends. Siniavsky, a short-story writer and recognized literary scholar, had an ironical analysis of socialist realism and several stories published in France under his pseudonym from 1956 to 1965. Finally identified as "Terts," he was arrested on September 8, 1965. Their trial produced outcries from Communist leaders in Britain, France and Italy and in the Soviet Union, where students demonstrated outside the courtroom and 63 Soviet writers signed petitions of protest. They were sentenced on February 12, 1966: Daniel to five and Siniavsky to seven years of hard labor. Daniel, released on September 12, 1970, was not allowed to return to Moscow and settled in Kaluga, where he continued to work as a translator and to publish under a pseudonym. Siniavsky was released on June 8, 1971, and given leave in 1973 to emigrate with his family. He is working as a professor of Russian literature in Paris and continues to use the pseudonym "Terts" for his prose writings.

226 *Brezhnev and his comrades:* Leonid Brezhnev (1906–1982) became general secretary of the Communist Party in 1966. The president of the Soviet Union was Nikolaj Podgorny (1903–1983), the prime minister Aleksey Kosygin (1904–1980). • *Potemkin arrangement:* derived from the name of Grigory Potemkin, a Russian statesman and a favorite of Catherine the Great who once had impressive fake villages built along a route the queen was to travel: thus the name "Potemkin" has come to signify a façade or display designed to obscure or shield some undesirable fact or conditions from someone.

228 *an elderly man, a poet:* probably Béla Balázs (1884–1949), who was also a short-story writer, novelist and noted film aesthetician. He held a number of posts in the 1918–19 Hungarian Soviet Republic. After the failure of the Communist government, he emigrated to Vienna, where he participated in the literary activities of Communist writers, and from there to Berlin in 1927, where he published some of his works but spent most of his time directing motion pictures and writing movie scripts. In 1931, he settled in Moscow where he taught at the Russian Film Academy, directed several films and wrote movie scripts, and played an important role in publishing Hungarian periodicals and in the Organization of Revolutionary Writers.

He returned to Hungary in September 1945, where he helped to revive the Hungarian motion picture industry.

230 *thirty years of exile*: As shown in the note for p. 227, Balázs lived 14 years in the Soviet Union after he left Hungary in 1919.

231 *Yeshiva*: An orthodox rabbinical seminary or academy of advanced Talmudic study for 13- to 18-year-olds who have completed the "heder," a Jewish elementary school in which students aged 7 to 13 are taught to read the Pentateuch, the Prayer Book and other books in Hebrew.

233 *Andrey Zhdanov* (1896–1948) was a Communist leader and general and a loyal supporter of Stalin. He was largely responsible for the extreme nationalism and the strict control of intellectuals in the post-war world, including those in the satellite nations, through the enforcement of policies that severely restricted Soviet cultural activities, including literary, imposing, for example, the tenets of socialist realism, which sought to be an instrument of propaganda for the Communist state. In 1932, the Union of Soviet Writers, in defining the role of literature, proclaimed socialist realism as the compulsory literary practice. The product of Stalin, Zhdanov and Gorky, it prescribed an optimistic view of socialist reality and the development of the Communist revolution: literature was to educate readers in the spirit of socialism. The doctrine is marked by absolute adherence to Party doctrine and the conventional style and techniques of realism. •*Sansculotte* is a general term applied to the lower classes in France during the French Revolution, who wore long trousers instead of knee breeches. It was usually the name given to the extreme republicans of Paris connected with the Jacobins, who instituted the Reign of Terror under Robespierre.

236 *tehinovniks*: civil servants. •*Petkov was hanged*: After Bulgaria was proclaimed a Peoples Republic in 1946, Georgij Dimitrov (1882–1949), the premier, began to eliminate potential opponents. Nikola Petkov (1893–1947), leader of the Agrarian Party, was accused of treason on June 6, 1947, and sentenced to death on August 16. •*land distribution*: The coalition government issued the decree eliminating large estates and granting land to those who cultivated it in 1945. The landed property of traitors and fascists and all estates exceeding 1,000 *hold* (1 *hold*=1.42 acres) were appropriated. Also distributed were lands belonging to banks and big business interests, but not properties less than 200 *hold* owned and actually being farmed by peasants for their livelihood. The reform affected 35% of the country's arable land. Those who shared in the distribution were: 100,000 former agricultural workers on the large estates, 261,000 other agricultural workers, 214,000 holders of land insuffi-

cient for their livelihood and small peasants and village craftsmen, with the average share of land per person amounting to 5.1 *hold*. The number of owners of 5-25 *hold*, the small and middle peasantry, increased by 1,200,000 •*nationalization of industries, banks and commerce*: The nationalization of industries began in May 1946, that of remaining industries in December 1946 and of banks and commercial properties they owned in November 1947. In March 1948, the government nationalized all business enterprises with 100 or more employees and then, in December 1949, those with 10-100 employees and those owned by foreign nations, except the Soviet Union: In effect, all means of production in the hands of the bourgeoisie became state property. At the same time, wholesale trade was also nationalized, private retail trade severely restricted, and new credit and commercial organizations rapidly set up. The structure of agriculture was also being radically transformed. Begun in late 1948, the organization of holdings into cooperatives accelerated in 1950 and 1951. The changes since 1948 reflected the growing power of the Communist Party, which assumed control in May 1949 under the headship of Mátyás Rákosi.

- 237 *When the news spread that the Hungarians received baptism*: Prince Géza (ruled from c.970 to 997) adopted Christianity but tolerated paganism. He began to establish the kingdom of Hungary by building harmonious relations with neighboring countries, cultivating contacts with foreign dynasties and settling Christian clerics and knights in the country. •*Benedict the Levite*: "Benedictus Levitus" is actually the assumed name of an unknown 9th-century compiler to whom is ascribed the third group of the *Collectio Capitularum*, a massive set of false acts or ordinances c.850 intended by a group of anonymous French authors to shore up the bishops' position and to rectify the poor condition of ecclesiastical-state affairs through falsified and forged texts attributed to the popes and the Carolingian princes, in reaction to a German law that viewed dioceses, churches and monasteries as lucrative properties subject to confiscation even by fraudulent means. •*propaganda fide*: missionary work, the *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide*, the College of Propaganda, a committee of cardinals established by Pope Gregory XV in 1622 to supervise the foreign missions of the Roman Catholic Church and train priests for them.

238 *drastvuitye*: how do you do; how are you

239 *bocher types*: "Bocher" is "bahur," a student in a Talmudic academy.

241 *in a famous memorandum*: probably a reference to the Carta of 1977, the manifesto of the movement for civil rights in Czechoslovakia, framed in January 1977.

- 245** *I was talking with one of these fellow travelers:* Probably Pál Justus (1905–1965), a sociologist, poet and translator who participated in the workers' movement since age twenty and became secretary of the Social Democratic Party in 1945. He was imprisoned in 1949 on trumped-up charges. Released during the 1956 Revolution, he worked at the Corvina Publishing House from that year on. •*the Red radio...first began blasting "Tito's chained dogs":* Anti-Tito propaganda commenced in June 1948. At a conference held in Bucharest, Rumania on June 28, the Cominform denounced him for defying Soviet supremacy. The acronym stands for Communist Information Bureau, which was founded in 1947 to reestablish information exchanges among European Communist Parties and consisted of the Communist parties of Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, France, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Rumania, the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. The Cominform was dissolved in 1956 as a gesture of reconciliation to Tito. •*it depicted Tito:* Tito headed a delegation that arrived in Budapest on December 6, 1947 to sign an agreement of Hungarian-Yugoslav friendship, cooperation and mutual aid.
- 246** *the Rajk case:* See the note for p. 361.
- 252** *Six of us together, one less than the seven wicked:* Based on a Hungarian folk-saying which claims that the number seven signified bad luck. Thus the portent for the journey is favorable.
- 261** *the years of my youth here:* 1923 to 1929. Márai left Hungary in 1919 and lived in Germany until 1923, studying journalism at the University of Leipzig and philosophy at the Universities of Frankfurt am Main and Berlin. He continued to study philosophy while in Paris.
- 262** *Like the generation before, maps were again being cut up with scissors:* a reference to the Treaty of Versailles, June 28, 1919, concluding World War I and to the treaties of Paris between the Allies and Italy, Rumania, Hungary, Bulgaria and Finland, February 10, 1947.
- 279** *As a generation before... I had to make the same decision:* Márai left Hungary in October 1919 and did not return until 1929.
- 280** *la-bas:* there, over there.
- 288** *I was greeted with news about the "conspiracies":* The director of the Headquarters of the State Police in Budapest issued an arrest warrant on December 31, 1946 against former Colonel-General Lajos Dálnoki Veres, accusing him of conspiring against the Republic. On January 5, 1947, the Ministry of the Interior claimed it had uncovered a plot by several prominent Hungarians to restore the Horthy regime by military force. The trial began on February 27,

and sentences were handed down on April 16. •*One of the accused in the first "conspiracy":* General Dálnoki Veres, György Donáth and Sándor András were sentenced to death, but the Court of Appeals allowed the death penalty to stand for Donáth (see the note for p. 289) and reduced the sentences of the other two to ten years of forced labor.

289 *President of the Republic:* Zoltán Tildy (1889–1961), filled the presidency from February 1, 1946 to July 30, 1949, having served as prime minister from November 1945. During the 1956 Revolution, he was Minister of State in Imre Nagy's government. For that activity he was sentenced to a six-year prison term by the Supreme Court but released in 1959. •*The so-called conspirators were put to death:* György Donáth, who was parliamentary representative of the Hungarian Life Party from 1939 to 1944 and a member of the conservative Hungarian Community Organization, which was reestablished after 1945, was executed on October 27, 1947. •*the Communists drove into exile... and put in his place:* Ferenc Nagy, on vacation in Switzerland, reported to the Hungarian Embassy in Bern on May 30, 1947 his resignation from the premiership and presidency of the Independent Smallholders' Party and his refusal to obey the government's summons to return to Hungary. He was replaced on May 30 by Lajos Dinnyés, also a member of the Smallholders' Party, who was serving as Minister of Defense.

295 A History was published in Hungary as a short course of study in 1945.

296 *one morning newspapers announced that the Hungarian Social Democratic Party...had merged with the Communist Party:* On June 12, 1948, the 4th Congress of the Hungarian Communist Party and the 37th Congress of the Social Democratic Party announced their merger into the Hungarian Working People's Party and the convening of its 1st Congress on June 13.

297 *In Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Rumania and Bulgaria:* In 1947, the Communists were moving into positions of power in other East European states. In Poland, the Democratic Bloc was victorious in the elections held on January 19 and formed a leftist coalition government. In Bulgaria, the two-year plan for rehabilitation had commenced, and the Petkov trial was under way. In Rumania, the leader of the Peasant Party was sentenced to life at hard labor for "anti-democratic" activities, the king abdicated on December 30, and a People's Republic was declared. The next year in Czechoslovakia, on February 5, 12 Communists became cabinet members in the new government, and Eduard Benes, after reluctantly approving the new regime, resigned in June, claiming poor health, and refused to sign

the new constitution. •*a scrap of paper*: Churchill recounts the transaction he conducted with Stalin on October 6, 1944 in Moscow:

"So far as Britain and Russia are concerned, how would it do for you to have ninety percent predominance in Rumania, for us to have ninety percent of the say in Greece, and go fifty-fifty about Yugoslavia?" While this was being translated I wrote out on a half-sheet of paper: Rumania: Russia 90%, the others 10%; Greece: Great Britain 90% (in accord with USA), Russia 10%; Yugoslavia 50-50%; Hungary 50-50%; Bulgaria: Russia 75%, the others 25%.

I pushed this across to Stalin, who had by then heard the translation. There was a slight pause. Then he took his blue pencil and made a large tick upon it, and passed it back to us. It was all settled in no more time than it takes to set down.

...

After this there was a long silence. The penciled paper lay in the center of the table. At length I said, "Might it not be thought rather cynical if it seemed we had disposed of these issues, so fateful to millions of people, in such an offhand manner? Let us burn the paper." No, you keep it," said Stalin. — From *The Second World War: Triumph and Tragedy*, Cambridge, Mass., 1953, V. 6, Bk 1: "The Tide of Victory."

298 *physical opposition (as in Poland, East Germany and Hungary)*: Márai is referring to the opposition the Communists faced in the three countries: the uprising in East Germany June 16-17, 1953, the events that began in Poland on June 28, 1956, and continued until Gomulka was named prime minister, and, of course, the 1956 Revolution in Hungary, October 23-November 4, when the Revolutionary Workers' and Peasants' government was formed under the leadership of János Kádár and the liquidation of the Revolution begun with the help of Soviet armed forces.

304 *Gül Baba's tomb*: A Turkish warrior, or, according to more recent views, the Mohammedan chief priest who fell dead on September 2, 1541, while celebrating victory in the Church of Our Lady (Matthias Church) on Castle Hill, which had been converted into a mosque. He had come to Budapest with the armies of Suleiman the Magnificent, who began the Turkish occupation of the nation's capital which was to last until 1686. In that year, an international army of the Habsburgs laid siege to Buda on June 21 and recaptured it on September 2.

306 *the aurea praxis*: from the proverb "Aurea praxis, sterilis theoria," or "Practice is golden, theory sterile." •*during the Bach period*: The period from 1849 to 1859 was named after Alexander Bach (1813-1893) who served as Minister of the Interior and became the

main figure in the ministry on the death of Prince Schwarzenberg in 1852. He instituted the Bach System of bureaucratic control in the Habsburg Empire. Its chief objectives were centralization and Germanization, which Bach sought to achieve through stringent control by the secret police.

312 *A Marxist philosopher who returned home from Moscow:* György Lukács (1885–1971), one of the leading critics in modern literature, combined Marxist social theory with aesthetics and humanism and set forth the links between creative work and social struggle. Having served in the cabinet of the Communist Béla Kun in 1919, Lukács fled Budapest when the Hungarian Soviet Republic fell, and lived in Berlin until the rise of Hitler, when he went to Moscow. He returned to Budapest in 1945, became professor of aesthetics and played an influential role in the Communist Party and Hungary's intellectual life. He was eventually attacked, however, for his sympathetic view of Western literature, and he lost all political impact after the 1956 Revolution.

314 *lever:* the reception of visitors on rising from bed by a regal person.

315 *Gyula Vargha* (1853–1921) published his first book of poems in 1881, which was followed by 23 years of silence while he wrote frequently on issues of economics and translated many literary works, including the writings of Friedrich Schiller, Victor Hugo, Sainte-Beuve and Théophile Gautier. His poems are simple and pessimistic in their political outlook and often concerned with old age.

317 *Árpád Tóth* (1886–1928), an important lyric poet and critic, shaped the literary principles of the *Nyugat* school with its orientation to the literature of the West. One of the best translators of his day, he accompanied all his translations with critical studies, including those of Milton, Keats, Baudelaire, Maupassant and Chekhov.

320 *Trofin Lysenko* (1898–1972) was the scientific and administrative leader in Soviet agriculture, the head of the Soviet Academy of Sciences' Institute of Genetics. He belonged to the Soviet school of genetics which rejected the genetic theories held by most geneticists, supporting, instead, the doctrine that characteristics acquired through environmental influences can be inherited.

321 *the Great Actress:* Gizi Bajor (1893–1951), one of the most distinguished actresses of the Hungarian stage and a life-long member of the National Theater, had, by the end of the Twenties, established herself as one of Hungary's most celebrated artists. She also appeared in many films from 1918 to 1941. Tibor Germán, her third husband, and a very successful nose, ear and throat specialist, fear-

ing that his wife was threatened by deafness, a brain tumor and a painful death, poisoned her on February 12, 1951, and committed suicide. A year after Bajor's death, a memorial museum was opened in her villa in Buda.

323 *the Oxford Program*: This international movement, founded in 1921 in reaction to World War I by Frank Nathan Daniel Buchmann (1878–1961), is variously called the First Century Christian Fellowship, the Oxford Group and Moral Rearmament. Its evangelistic work for personal and national spiritual reconstruction stressed absolute honesty, purity, love and unselfishness, and was conducted informally and intimately in groups assembled in educational institutions, churches and homes to share personal spiritual experiences.

324 *mélomane*: music lover.

334 *the peacetime marriage security*: At the time, officers were required to place a deposit with the army as evidence that the couple would be able to maintain a way of life suitable to an officer's social position.

339 *Krúdyism*: a form of writing using impressionistic moods and typical portrayal of characters in which the chief character is, to all intents and purposes, the author himself.

340 *A March poet-youth*: Sándor Petőfi (1823–1849), one of Hungary's greatest poets whose poetic activity merged directly with the revolution of Hungary against Austria in March 15, 1848. On that day, Petőfi and his fellow revolutionaries assembled at the Pilvax Café, in the inner city of Budapest, at news of the revolution in Vienna to form their own plans for revolution. On the next day, the group marched to the universities and through the streets of Pest with the 25-year-old poet reciting his recently composed poem "National Song" at several places along the way. Petőfi fell on July 31, 1849 in a battle between the Hungarian revolutionary army and the Russian forces that had intervened on the side of the Austrians. His body was never recovered.

341 *When Krúdy died*: May 12, 1933.

342 *László Cholnoky* (1897–1929), a former journalist who tried to make a living writing fiction, is counted among the important Hungarian writers in the first quarter of the 20th century for his psychological insights and lyrical style. He committed suicide, possibly because of his extreme poverty. • *Géza Csáth* (1887–1919), a prose writer, literary and music critic and neuropathologist. Severely wounded in World War I, he became addicted to morphine. While being treated

for the addiction, he escaped, shot his wife to death, took poison and cut his veins but survived. Wanting to enter a clinic in Budapest, he escaped from a hospital in Szabadka, and when arrested by the Yugoslav border guards, he took poison again and died. The grotesque, deranged, tormented world of the neuropath or near-neuropath agitates his stories, which are sometimes nearly clinical in their analysis. A selection of his stories was published in English translation in 1980: *The Magician's Garden and Other Stories*, Corvina Books, Budapest.

347 *Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky* (1886–1944), a leader and politician in the struggle for an independent Hungary during World War II, opposed the Hungarian government's foreign and domestic policies friendly to Nazi Germany and called for Hungary's withdrawal from the war. The Gestapo who came to arrest him on March 19, 1944, captured him only after wounding him in a fierce gun battle. Freed on October 15 at the request of the Hungarian government, he soon formed and became president of the Liberation Committee of the Hungarian National Uprising to lead the struggle against the Germans. Captured again, he was sentenced to death by a Szálasi court and executed on December 5, 1944. He was formally buried with solemn funeral pomp on May 27, 1945.

353 *feuilleton*: the section of one or more pages (usually at the bottom of a newspaper set aside for light literature, criticism, short stories, etc.)

359 *Boris Pasternak* (1890–1960), long a hero to Russian intellectuals for his resistance to the Communist state, is best known in the West for his novel *Dr. Zhivago*, which was published first in English in 1958 and then in Russian in the United States in 1959. Its repudiation of Communist society and its Christian idealism offended the Soviet government. Faced with an antagonistic Soviet press, expulsion from his native land and possible exile, Pasternak was compelled to turn down the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1958. Expelled from the Writers Union, he lived in virtual exile in an artistic community near Moscow until his death.

361 *the presentation volume*: its translated title: *Hungarian Writers and Poets on Mátyás Rákosi* (1952). • *the Communists had already executed Rajk*: László Rajk (1908–1949), active in the Hungarian Communist Party in the 1930s, served with the Hungarian Battalion of the International Brigade in the Spanish Civil War. On the conclusion of the war, he was interned in France but escaped in 1941 and returned to Hungary, where he was again interned. Released in September 1944, he became secretary of the Hungarian Communist Party's Central Committee and a leader of the Home Front. The

Arrow Cross arrested him again and eventually shipped him to Munich. Returning from there on May 17, 1945, he again played a leading role in Party activities until 1949. On May 31, 1949, he was tried on false charges by the Rákosi government, sentenced to death, and executed on October 21, 1949. He was "rehabilitated" on March 27, 1956, and buried with solemn ceremony on October 6, the day in 1849 on which the leading generals of Hungary's War of Independence, the "Martyrs of Arad," were executed by the Austrians. *Béla Kun* (1896–1938) an agent of the Bolsheviks, founded the Hungarian Soviet Republic on March 21, 1919, when the coalition government headed by Mihály Károlyi collapsed. His government fell on August 1, 1919, when the Rumanian army marched into Hungary. Forced to flee, he went to Vienna and then to Russia, where he lived until he became a victim of the Stalin purges in the 1930s.

362 *the Russians, too, had already made up their minds to bundle the nation's overly-zealous leader out of the country:* The anti-Stalinists removed Mátyás Rákosi as first secretary of the Hungarian Working People's Party on June 21, 1956. He went to the Soviet Union in October 1956, where he lived until his death in 1971.

366 *mouches volantes:* motes in the eyes, floating specks.

370 *Gyula Szini* (1876–1932), a journalist, his major interests lay in literature and the arts. In his own novels and short stories, he was a symbolist rather than a realist. His fellow authors held his ability to construct narratives and his lyricism in high regard, but he never enjoyed great popularity with general readers.

372 *István Tömörkény* (1874–1915): a short-story writer and ethnologist. His stories portray realistically the life and problems of peasants on isolated farms and of workers in the Szeged area. •*Károly Lovik* (1874–1915), a writer and journalist, wrote successful sketches almost effortlessly. He knew the Hungarian gentry well and viewed them with a disillusioned eye. His contemporaries, recognizing his great talent, considered his lifework the prototype of an author squandering his gifts. •*László Paál* (1846–1879), was one of Hungary's most important painters of the 19th century. From 1872 on, he worked in the village of Barbizon, from which the Barbizon School derived its name.

373 *Viktor Cholnoky* (1868–1912), a writer and journalist whose stories and publicist writings, many of them characterized by great crudition and unclouded political insight, quickly became popular. His stories, using romantic colors and, often, fantastic episodes evoked memories of the distant past and blended elements of ancient cultures, old tales and superstitions. •*Tivadar Csontváry Kosztka*

(1853–1919): His visionary paintings are characterized by brilliant colors and symbolic power. They have been frequently and successfully exhibited abroad. •*Tamás Molý*: (1875–1957), was the first to write detective and adventure stories in Hungary. His second subject was the life of artists and the world of the theater. His novels were very popular between the two world wars. •*Sándor Térey Kuthy* (1886–1955): Contemporary critics widely praised Kuthy's poetry. At age thirty, however, his interest increasingly turned to translation, and among the writers he translated were Baudelaire, Villon, Verlaine and Aragon.

374 *Zoltán Ambrus* (1861–1932), a central literary figure of the 1880s, was the first to write about big-city life in detail in Hungarian literature, depicting in his novels and short stories the changes occurring in Hungarian society in the decades after the Compromise of 1867. He helped to create a new Hungarian drama criticism by separating it from the academic outlook. •*Jenő Péterfy* (1850–1899), one of the most important essayists and critics in Hungarian literature, is looked upon as a master stylist of analytical and critical prose. •*Frigyes Riedl* (1856–1921), a highly esteemed literary historian and essayist, served from 1877 on as the regular book reviewer for the *Budapest Revue*, a learned and literary journal publishing academically oriented studies and critiques and original literary works. •*László Lakatos* (1882–1944), a writer and journalist, criticized the Hungarian upper middle class in satirical stories in which paradox and aphorism play a major role. His plays were successfully produced abroad. •*Menyhért Szász* (1893–1939), a poet and journalist, is best remembered for his anti-war poems. •*Artúr Keleti* (1889–1969), a poet and translator, revived the feeling of the Middle Ages in his best poetry. His works were issued in beautifully illustrated editions. •*István Szegedi* (1886–1944), a poet, whose writings appeared in progressive literary journals. His most successful work is his autobiography, written in tercets.

376 *Babits's translation of The Divine Comedy*: His translation of *Inferno* appeared in 1913, *Purgatory* in 1910 and *Paradise* in 1923. Babits also published an introduction to *The Divine Comedy* for readers in 1930.

377 *the very same poet who, though dying...was still revising his translation of Sophocles*: Babits was revising his translations of *King Oedipus* and *Oedipus at Colonus* at the time of his death. They were published in 1943, two years after his death. •*János Arany's masterly translations*: Arany translated eleven of the Aristophanes comedies. •*the Odyssey, which several translated*: Eight Hungarian translations of the epic have appeared, the first in 1780 and the latest in 1947.

- 378 *Gyula Török* (1888–1918), was a major contributor to the development of realistic fiction in Hungarian literature. His novels are critical of the gentry, *The Ring with a Green Stone* (1918) relating its decline during the years after the 1867 Compromise through the story of a family. •*Géza, the General Secretary*: Géza Voinovich (1877–1952), a literary historian and aesthetician, was general secretary of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences from 1935 to 1949. •*Toldi's Love*: Arany worked on this poetic tale from 1863 to 1879.
- 381 *Baron József Eötvös* (1813–1871): Besides works on politics and law, Eötvös wrote dramas, poems and novels. He created the realistic novel in Hungary by giving it social purpose as an instrument of agitation and political propaganda. •*Szabad Nép* (Free People), a political newspaper which was the illegal organ of the Hungarian Communist Party from February 1 to May 1942. Police seized its press and editors, but the paper reappeared in September 1944. After the liberation of Budapest, it resumed publication legally on March 25, 1945, as the voice of the Communist Party. It became the main newspaper of the Hungarian Working People's Party, and continued as *Népszabadság* (People's Freedom) in November 1956.

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A seamless combination of the political, literary and personal history of postwar Hungary

This scathing, at times humorous, and always insightful memoir by exiled Hungarian novelist Sándor Márai provides one of the most poignant and humanly alive portraits of life in Hungary between the German occupation in 1944 and the solidification of communist power in 1948. Both a fervent anti-fascist and anti-communist, Márai draws a vivid portrait of the Hungarian peasantry and middle class during this period, while delivering a telling indictment of the communist system from which he fled. Witty, aphoristic and psychologically clear-sighted, this memoir depicts the tragedy and pathos of a crucial period in the postwar history of a nation which has been 'central' to both the communist and the postcommunist history of our times.

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The New York Review of Books

About the author

Sándor Márai (1900-1989) published 46 books, mostly novels, before leaving Hungary for political reasons in September 1948. He was considered to be Hungary's most influential representative of middle-class literature between the wars. After leaving Hungary and settling in the United States, he continued to write prolifically. He died in 1989, apparently taking his own life, and in the same year was awarded the Kossuth Prize, Hungary's highest award for literature.